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THE

TWO CONVICTS

BY

FREDERICK GERSTAËCKER

AUTHOR OF
"THE PIRATES OF THE MISSISSIPPI" "WILD SPORTS IN THE FAR WEST"
ETC. ETC.

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Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816-1874) was born at Hamburg. He went to America in 1837, and spent six years hunting and travelling. Returning to Germany, he again left it in 1849 to travel in South America and Australia. On his return he settled at Leipzig. In 1860 he accompanied the Duke of Saxe to Egypt and Abyssinia. He published travels as well as novels.

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THE TWO CONVICTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE STATION ON THE MURRAY.

All was bustle and activity, life and joy, at the squatter Powell's generally still and lonely station, which was situated on the river Murray, and the shout, "The waggons are coming!" passed from mouth to mouth.

The waggons were coming, certainly; and a stranger would have perceived nothing extraordinary in the event. But he who has lived there, or is acquainted with life at a station, knows the significance and full importance of this news.

The intercourse between the stations situated on the Murray and in the interior of Australia, the owners of which are called squatters, and the rest of the world, is carried on almost entirely by means of waggons drawn by bullocks. These convey the products of the stations, such as wool, tallow, skins, and sheep, to the nearest town, and, if possible, to a seaport, and they return loaded with everything wanted in the bush, such as sacks of flour, casks of sugar, chests of tea, tobacco, horse-shoes, clothes, boots, &c., &c. As the arrival of the waggons, particularly at distant stations, takes place only once a-year, the reader can easily imagine how eagerly such an event is expected, how joyfully their return is greeted.

The small population of such a station, resting in the bush like an island in the ocean, have plenty of opportunities for the exercise of patience. Bullock-drays are an extremely slow kind of conveyance; and bullock-drivers, trustworthy as they may be, terribly sleepy messengers; and when the time of their return has to be reckoned by months, it almost seems as if it would never arrive.

Before breakfast, on the morning upon which our story opens, a storekeeper had arrived at the station at the full speed of his foaming horse, to announce the joyful news that the waggons were only a few miles distant, having encamped the previous night by the river, and that they might therefore be expected at any hour. He brought with him a large bag of letters and newspapers, entrusted to his care for more speedy delivery—letters from home!—Only those who have spent years and months abroad, without news from the dear ones at home, can comprehend the blissful and wonderful feeling which fills the heart as one opens the long and ardently wished-for messages of love and affection. Letters from home!—Why, the post-mark itself is a remembrancer of our youth: the address, the seal—the *name* of our native town, with the somewhat old date, all suggest pleasant recollections; and the news itself, the beloved words the letter brings us—intelligence which stirs our innermost soul, telling that all those dear to us are well and happy, still thinking of us with their old undiminished love—gives fresh enjoyment to our lonely existence. Such a day as this is indeed a joyous festival in the monotonous life of the settler: the letters are read over and over again, first in silence and alone, then aloud to the family circle, and the dear and beloved characters are repeatedly conned.

The Powells were no exception in this respect. Breakfast was served, but soon grew cold; for no one, with the exception of the children, thought of touching it. Torn envelopes covered the floor; open letters hastily glanced over, and newspapers still folded up, were strewn upon the table in all directions; and the family were scattered, some in one nook, some in another, reading in silence.

John Powell was one of the wealthiest squatters on the Murray, possessing numerous herds and a pretty comfortable station—that is to say, comfortable for the bush. In a civilized country it would scarcely have been considered a proper habitation for a man occupying his position in life. But in the bush there are but few pretensions; and even the ladies, after a few years, which passed rather slowly, felt happy, or at least contented, in this new sphere, so different from the one to which they had been accustomed.

John Powell was a married man, with a family of five children; consisting of two daughters, the eldest being nine-

teen, the youngest sixteen years of age; and three sons, whose respective ages were, twenty, thirteen, and twelve. He had settled on the Murray about seven years before, in order to obtain sufficient room for his increasing flocks; and of this he had indeed plenty, for his nearest neighbour lived about thirty miles from his station. In such a desert, amidst interminable forests of Australian gum-trees, the sole resources of his family were in each other. No wonder they looked forward impatiently to the time when their father, as they hoped, would dispose of his property and return to their fatherland. Indeed, most settlers, in whatever part of the world their lot may be cast, cherish the same hope, especially when they have brought their wives with them from their native country. Their heart is entwined with the old home, whatever advantages their new one may offer; nor can they forget the old connections, the old places. Even when they are not bound by family ties, the longing works and gnaws at their hearts, leaving them no rest until they can embark for the old and beloved shores.

This longing becomes almost irresistible when the letters of friends, like reminding messengers, knock at the doors of the heart. Pleasure and pain are mingled in the tear that steals down the smiling cheek. Each member of the circle seeks to conceal from the other what all would speak, and no one has courage to express. Each one fears to arouse in his neighbour's breast those feelings which torment his own, little suspecting that they are already at work.

The silence was first broken by Mrs. Powell.

"God be thanked! they are all well and happy, even mother," she exclaimed, trying to conceal a tear, and hastily brushing it off as she put her spectacles on the window-sill, near which she was seated. "The dear old woman has written herself, although she complains that her eyesight is by no means so good as it used to be. You must read the letter presently, John. She longs so very, very much to see us once more before she dies."

"Well, well; who knows?" said Mr. Powell, with a smile, putting up one letter and opening another. "My brother has reached Bombay, is well, and in good circumstances."

"Is uncle Ernest still at Quebec?" asked Sarah. "He promised to come and see us. Does he say nothing about it?"

"Oh yes, certainly," her father replied, giving the letter to

his daughter: "there, read it yourself. He has left the army, and thinks of being in Old England by Christmas. That is his shortest way of getting here."

"His shortest way!" repeated Mrs. Powell, with a low and scarcely suppressed sigh. "It is thousands of miles!"

"It certainly is not so very near," said Mr. Powell, smiling; "but what are distances in these times? You go aboard, make yourself comfortable, and it is pretty much the same in the end, whether the voyage lasts four weeks or four months: you are only somewhat longer on your journey."

"How scattered we are about the world!" said Sarah, thoughtfully, with her hands folded over the letter in her lap. "What distances separate us from all those who are dear to us!"

"Certainly," replied her father, nodding his head; "that is the case with the members of my family in particular. Of the five brothers, only one lives in Old England. I am here, Ernest is in Canada, Edward at Bombay, and the fifth is now sailing on board one of her Majesty's men-of-war—God knows where!—in the Chinese or Pacific Ocean. That would, indeed, be a joyful day, which should see us all once more re-united around *one* table! There is, however, little chance of that: we shall all be old and grey before that time arrives."

"I hope the meeting may take place in England," said Mrs. Powell, with a smile. "If some good spirit would assure us of the advent of such a day of union, I would willingly and cheerfully bear with anything."

Her husband looked at her as if about to say something. If such was, however, his intention, he suddenly changed his mind, and was soon lost again in the letter which he had just opened and commenced reading. He had scarcely finished it, when he heard the barking of the dogs before the house, and the cracking of the long whips of the bullock-drivers announced the arrival of the waggons. The whole family, with the exception of the eldest son, who was in the bush, looking after a few horses which had strayed, stepped to the door of the house, to welcome the men, and see what they brought back.

"Well, Cole," said Mr. Powell, addressing the old bullock-driver who had charge of the leading waggon, "how are you? I am glad to see you at last. I suppose you had bad roads."

"Thank you, sir!" replied the man, at the same time turning the foremost bullocks round with a well-directed lash of his long and heavy whip, which he used with both hands. Thus he brought the waggon nicely to the door of the storehouse. "Oh, woh, Diamond,—woh! Back,—that's right. Cursed——. Beg pardon, sir;—very bad roads indeed, and the wood scattered about the Billibong as if they wanted to build stacks of it without end. I suppose you have received the bag?"

"All right, Cole."

"The accounts are in it."

"I have seen them already. Wool stands pretty firm."

"And flour too. I'll be—I'll—hem——. You have no idea, sir, how these rascally dealers go on with their flour. They'll soon not know what to ask for it."

"Gently, gently, my man: take care you don't burst any of the sacks. That's it; put them down here—the sacks together, and the rest there—in a row, that I may examine them together. The tea——. Ah, there are the chests."

"Little danger of our forgetting them," said the driver, laughing, whilst unyoking his cattle, taking care to leave the unloading of the goods to other hands. "Life in the bush would be terrible without tea; you might as well be a dingo, or even one of those beasts of blacks."

His mate had, in the meantime, assisted him in unyoking the bullocks, and Cole, with a half-suppressed oath, drove them away, to have their yokes taken off and to be turned loose into the grass.

He had scarcely got out of hearing, when, as if to ease his heart, he commenced by giving the leaders a few sound cracks about the ears with his whip, and then broke out into a tremendous torrent of oaths. All this, however, was nothing more than an ebullition of joy at his return, and also as a compensation for the unusual restraint the presence of his master and the ladies had imposed upon him for a few minutes. He knew very well that Mr. Powell did not allow any of his men to swear in his presence.

Cole was a thoroughly honest, faithful, and trustworthy servant; the most kindhearted fellow in the world, who would not hurt a child. Although formerly a convict, he had been liberated several years. Swearing was his passion; and it is altogether frightful to what extent cursing and blaspheming

are carried on and have increased among the people in the bush. People are apt to fancy that this is one of the chief and most striking vices of sailors, who are but too prone to give vent to their feelings in this manner. But sailors are surpassed by the "old hands" in the bush: indeed, no comparison can be made between the two.

Almost every word they speak, even the most indifferent, is accompanied by an oath, which is but a friendly and well-meaning locution among them, something equivalent to "How are you, my boy?" Their constant occupation with the obstinate bullocks may, in some measure, account for this bad practice.

This is one of the worst evils attending life in the bush, where these men are and remain entirely withdrawn from the softening influences of female society. The settler has, of course, his family about him; but the men have no connexion with the *house*, as it is emphatically called, to distinguish it from the *huts*. Even the kitchen department is attended to by a man; and as at least nine-tenths of the labourers at the stations, or those who visit them, are liberated convicts, one can easily understand that their conversation is not of a very refined nature. It only portrays the harsh destiny of their life; and the "fine speaking" is left to the "swells," that is, to those who have a decent coat upon their backs, and do not belong to the class of "old hands" or "bundlemen."

With the assistance of the labourers who happened to be at work near the house, the provisions were at last removed into the storehouse, although not immediately locked up. George, the eldest of Mr. Powell's sons, who had returned at full speed on hearing the cracking of the bullock-drivers' whips, was, as well as his younger brother, engaged an hour weighing out tobacco to the labourers, or distributing various trifles which they had been impatiently expecting for months.

The want of tobacco—that comfort of the bush—had been severely felt for the last few weeks, and the men put off from day to day for the arrival of the waggons. Their patience was quite exhausted; they could scarcely wait to be served, and the yard was soon filled with men, chewing and smoking, and looking as happy as possible. Life was now twice as lightsome: they had tobacco, and seemed to care for little else.

In the house, the letters had at last been read over and over again, and their contents fully discussed. George Powell, the eldest son, opened the parcel of newspapers, and was soon completely absorbed in the perusal of their contents. His father followed his example; for, besides the home news, describing the state of affairs, there was intelligence from Adelaide and Melbourne, treating chiefly of the markets, sales, and auctions, which had immediate reference to their own interests, although only the material ones.

"Look here, George!" said Mr. Powell, after perusing the columns of his newspaper from Melbourne for some time; "horses fetched as much as 12*l.* at the last market in Melbourne and Adelaide. I wish we had sent a lot of ours."

"But cattle seems to be so much lower," replied George, handing his paper to his father. "There, you see, the drovers have been obliged to sell a drove of cows at one-pound-ten per head."

"Lean beasts," answered his father, "which they send in droves, and bring to market half-starved. If we drove ours over, I feel certain we should get a better price for them.

"Yes, if they arrived in good condition," replied George; "but there is a scarcity of pasture on the road. In fact, I cannot tell what we shall do, if we do not get rain soon. Even the water-holes in the lagoon are beginning to dry up, and the grass is so thinly scattered, that the poor brutes get hungry walking from one blade to the other."

"Not quite so bad as that yet," said Mr. Powell, laughing. "Flour has risen too. I wonder at that: shiploads have gone to Sydney. Sugar does not seem to be so high."

"Rice, also," continued George. "I am glad Cole brought some."

"Hallo, here!—the bushranger* has again appeared," exclaimed the father, suddenly, taking up another paper, and glancing over the first column.

"The mounted police will soon be upon his track," observed George, turning his head and crossing his legs. "These fellows cannot evade pursuit very long now."

"Jack Loudon, *alias* Murphy, *alias* Bridol," continued Mr. Powell, reading aloud—"the fellow has a whole string of *aliases!*—escaped from Van Diemen's Land, with three companions, in a small cutter, and seems to have been wrecked

* Escaped convicts, who live in the backwoods, and subsist upon plunder.

upon the coast. Then he went to Adelaide, where he committed several frauds, was caught, escaped again, and now there is a reward of one hundred guineas set upon his head. Well, I suppose the police will look pretty sharp after him. A hundred guineas is a capital bait for them."

"A great many robberies have taken place in town; there is a whole column of them," added George.

"I should not like to live in the towns," said Sarah, with a deep sigh. "The worst people of the colonies are congregated there. I do not think that I could sleep comfortably for a single night. I should always fear lest robbers should break into the house, or some other calamity."

"You are now accustomed to the quiet and retired life we lead here," said her father, in a kindly manner; "and you would just as soon get habituated to the noise, turmoil, and activity of towns, and feel as safe in them. When we were at Sydney, three years ago, I recollect you liked the place very well; and I suppose you still remember how afraid you were here at first of some unexpected attack from the natives; and yet, you see, they never came."

"Oh, John! do not tempt Providence," exclaimed his wife, imploringly. "Are we more secure now than we were seven years ago?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Powell, laughing; "for we have not only three more men on the station, but our sons have grown up, and learned to break in a horse and to use a gun. This is equal to six men for purposes of defence, and they are worth a whole tribe of such cowardly fellows as the natives. I should not be afraid now if sixty of them were to come against us. Besides, they are so afraid of their own evil spirits, that they never venture to make an attack after dark."

"Yet, sometimes, when all our people are scattered about in the bush, a strange feeling of fear creeps over me," said Mrs. Powell; "and when I look at these letters, and think of the safety in which those who have written them live——"

"Why, it is only lately that you have grown so melancholy," Mr. Powell remarked, with a smile, trying to tranquillize his wife; "because we have been more solitary than usual. With the exception of a few itinerant pedlers, belonging by right to the kitchen, we have not had a single visitor; and the roads seem to be perfectly deserted."

"Who is likely to wander to these distant and solitary places?" replied his wife, with a shake of the head. "Sometimes, perhaps, a few cattle-drivers, or a grazier looking out for new pasture-ground, may come this way; but these people cannot supply what we want. Last year, we had at least the pleasure of seeing young M'Donald; since he left, so suddenly, we have scarcely had a single visitor."

"It is very strange, indeed," said Mr. Powell, dropping the paper, "that M'Donald should have disappeared so suddenly, without having given us any intimation of his intention, or left any trace of his destination. I really begin to fear he has fallen into the hands of some desperate bushranger. I recollect there was a report, just then, that several of them were haunting the bush, and M'Donald did not look as if he would let them rob him quietly."

"I am much more afraid he has fallen a prey to the blacks," said George, a slightly-made, blue-eyed, fair-haired young fellow, with an open and honest countenance, thoroughly sunburnt. "If I were certain that such were the case, I would make the black curs pay for it dearly enough."

"They are innocent in this instance," replied his father, firmly. "You know very well I caused inquiries to be made after him at the different stations, and we only lost traces of him in the well-occupied districts, where he could have nothing to fear from the blacks."

"Oh, do not be afraid, he will turn up some day," said Lisbeth, the second and more lively daughter, with a laugh. "Why, he only went away to get a few books which Sarah was anxious to have, and, as he very probably could not find them in Melbourne, has no doubt gone over to England to fetch them. In that case, he could scarcely have got back yet."

Sarah listened to the conversation without making any remark; but her eyes wandered almost unconsciously over the columns of the newspaper she was holding in her hands. At the jesting allusion of her sister, her cheeks, which had at first turned very pale, were suffused with blushes.

Sarah was a lovely flower of the bush. She was beautiful as the soft sunlight, with deep, dark hazel eyes, full of expression. She scarcely knew another world besides the bush; for she had left England when a child, lived with her parents at Sydney for some years, and then removed with them to the

remotest regions of Australian civilization. There were, therefore, few memories to which her heart could cling; but on those it fixed so much the more firmly. One of those pleasant periods in her life had been the appearance of a young squatter, who came from Melbourne, spent about a fortnight with them, left them suddenly, and was never heard of again. Lisbeth's jest was not, however, without foundation. Sarah's wish to obtain a few books in her solitude, amongst which were Thomas Moore's "Lallah Rookh," and Sir Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake," was actually the cause why M'Donald, with a sort of chivalrous gallantry, left the station, mounted his horse, and repaired to the distant town. He certainly promised to return within eight weeks at the latest; but an entire year had now passed away, and all attempts to discover what had become of him proved abortive.

"Pray do not jest about these things, my dear child," said Mrs. Powell, perceiving the painful impression which these words had produced upon Sarah's mind. "Who knows what may have happened to the poor, unfortunate young man. Let us hope, however, that God has protected him. I should be very glad indeed to greet his open and manly countenance once more, that we may not have to reproach ourselves with being the cause of any misfortune that may have occurred to him."

"You must not make yourself weary with such thoughts," Mr. Powell observed. "In this vast Australia, men will sometimes wander about strangely by themselves. I have frequently met suddenly with people whom I had long thought dead, and who had merely been led from one place to another by accident; and they would again as quickly disappear as before in pursuit of their occupations. But a man like M'Donald, looking out for a station, has particular reasons for keeping his whereabouts secret, if he has found good pasture-grounds, that they may not be snapped up by another. Who knows on what excellent station he may now be rearing sheep and cattle?"

"Mr. Bale, the stock-keeper, is coming," said Lisbeth, whose attention was attracted by the sound of an approaching horseman.

"Mr. Bale? No, this is not Mr. Bale," said Bill, Mr. Powell's second son, who was standing by his sister, looking in the same direction; "it is a grey, and Mr. Bale rides a bay. It must be a stranger!"

"A stranger!" cried Mr. Powell, rising from his chair and walking towards the window, where he was soon followed by the whole family. "Lo! it is, indeed,—and, as it seems, some gentleman squatter. His long beard does not betoken the townsman: he appears to be a hunter, from his gun. Go, George; welcome him, and show him in. Put his horse into the paddock. It is really true," he added, turning to his family with a smile; "good or ill luck never comes alone. For a long time we have been vainly yearning for some communication from the world, and to-day we receive letters and newspapers, and a stranger arrives into the bargain. He is heartily welcome."

CHAPTER II.

THE VISITOR.

Not many minutes elapsed before the horseman, who could scarcely have had time to dismount, knocked at the parlour door, which, to George's astonishment, he seemed to know as well as if he had been an old inmate of the house. The astonished owner had hardly exclaimed "Come in!" before the latch gave way to the pressure of his finger, and the stranger, with a leathern bag hanging on his arm, entered the room with a hearty "How are you all?"

"How are you, sir?" replied Mr. Powell, somewhat disconcerted at the familiar address of the new-comer. The other members of the family examined him with curiosity, whilst Sarah fixed her looks on him in anxious and painful suspense.

"I wish you," continued Mr. Powell, "a very hearty welcome to our quiet solitude, and hope you will make yourself comfortable, and consider yourself at home."

"I am very much obliged to you, indeed, Mr. Powell," replied the stranger, seizing the proffered hand and warmly shaking it. "But am I, indeed, so very much changed? Does this long beard alter me so completely that neither you, Mrs. Powell, nor the young ladies, recognise me?—How the children have all grown up!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Sarah, while her parents still examined the stranger in silence and doubt, and the younger members of the family approached him with cu-

riosity. "Is it not—is it not Mr. M'Donald?" As she pronounced the name a deep blush stole over her countenance.

"I am happy that you, at least, have not forgotten the stranger," said M'Donald, with emotion, at the same time offering his hand, which Sarah took bashfully.

"M'Donald!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with a hearty greeting. All now pressed around their former guest, anxious to welcome one of whom they retained such pleasant recollections.

"We were speaking of you a minute since, and trying to make out what could have become of you," exclaimed Mrs. Powell.

"Cry wolf, and he will come at last, says an old proverb," answered M'Donald, with a smile. "But did I not promise Miss Sarah the books, and was I not bound to bring them?"

"You see, I was right," said Lisbeth, laughing. "He could not get them at Melbourne, and went a little further —perhaps to London—for them."

"Not quite so far as that," replied the young man, good-humouredly; "but I certainly did not get them without some trouble. I may tell you of that one day. At any rate, here they are, and I hope they will interest Miss Sarah as much as she anticipated."

With these words the young man opened his leathern bag, and took out about half-a-dozen books, carefully packed up in oil-cloth, placing them upon the table before the blushing girl, whose looks sufficiently expressed her thanks. "I hope," he added, "they have not got wet. I was obliged to ford the Murray several times, and even to make my horse swim across with me on his back; but I always took the greatest care of them."

"There is a hole here," cried Ned, a boy twelve years of age, who had approached the table, and was examining and handling the parcel without much ceremony.

"It looks as if a bullet had struck it," said George, examining the fracture, and showing it to his father.

"It does not only look so, but this has actually been the case," replied the stranger, laughing. "The book probably saved my life; at any rate, it warded off a wound which might have been mortal. My pistol went off in the belt, and the bag, which I had just spread before me to take out some provisions, luckily for me, received the shot. I hope the

book is not spoiled. I do not think the thick binding and the hard-pressed paper would let the bullet penetrate very far: indeed, I have not had time to look at it yet."

"And very likely you were far away, beyond the reach of human succour?" inquired Mrs. Powell, anxiously, with clasped hands.

"Far, far away from human habitation, from human compassion," replied the young man, in an earnest voice. "Far away in the bush, even without water, and threatened by a hostile tribe of blacks, set on my track by this unlucky shot. Had I been severely wounded, I must have fallen into their hands. I was only saved by Miss Sarah's books."

"I shall always consider this book as a dear keepsake," said Sarah, with deep emotion. "But were you obliged to expose yourself to such danger?"

"To such danger?" replied the young man, laughing. "Just ask your father and your brothers whether they are not exposed to the same accidents in the bush every day in the week? A horse may fall with them in its wild career; a furious bull may attack them, and mutilate or kill them; a swarm of blacks may pounce upon the solitary horseman——"

"Or some bushranger blow out our brains from behind a gum-tree," added Mr. Powell. "Of course, we are never safe against such accidents."

"Safe from bushrangers at least, I hope," said the guest, with a smile. "As far as I know, nothing has been heard of any of these gentlemen for a long time."

"For a long time!" exclaimed George. "Look at the paper there; you will see a long account of one who has escaped, and upon whose capture or head a reward of a hundred guineas is set."

"A hundred guineas!" exclaimed M'Donald, with an expression of astonishment; "but how is that possible? I came direct from Melbourne, and I must have heard of so unusual an occurrence. A hundred guineas! I certainly recollect something similar. What is the date of your paper?"

"The date? Indeed I never thought of looking at that," George replied, searching for the paper among the rest; "but, it is true, the waggons have been a good while on the road."

"The bullock-drays have brought this *news?*" said M'Donald, laughing. "Well, that is not bad!"

"Ah! here is the paper. The 15th; well, it is somewhat old, certainly—the 15th of December in last year."

"And this is April," replied the guest. "Yes; then your paper may be right. What is the name of the fellow?"

"Jack Loudon, with a string of *aliases*," answered Mr. Powell.

"Quite right: it is the same. But he was soon caught again; and, as far as I know, the reward for his apprehension was duly paid to those who captured him."

"The 15th of December?" exclaimed Mrs. Powell, with surprise. "Pretty news, indeed! There was no occasion for much alarm."

"Did you ever see that man out in the woods; is he like a wild man?" asked Ned, the youngest boy, who took a special interest in bushrangers.

"Why, not exactly like a wild man," answered M'Donald. "I once caught a glance of him in town, just as they were bringing him in prisoner."

"Well, how did he look?" asked Bill, with eagerness.

"Indeed, my dear boy," said the guest, "I am scarcely able to tell you. Such a sight always produces an extremely unpleasant, even painful, impression upon me, and I invariably try to get out of the way."

"You are perfectly right," said Mrs. Powell, assenting. "There is quite enough sorrow and misery in the world without running in search of it; and we meet with it at every turn, even when trying to avoid it."

"Oh, but I should so much like to see a bushranger hanged!" exclaimed Bill, with sparkling eyes.

"Bill!" cried his mother and sisters at the same time, with an expression of horror and reproof.

"Who can have put such bloodthirsty ideas into the boy's head?" added his mother, with a shudder. "Fie, child; you ought to be ashamed of yourself to entertain such wishes; but pray to God to drive them from your heart!"

"Oh, do not be uneasy about it, Mrs. Powell," said M'Donald, endeavouring to calm her. "Boys reared in the bush get into a habit of repeating what they hear in the company of herdsmen, shepherds, cattle-drivers, who, of

course, are not very refined. The boy's heart may at the same time remain good and pure; it is only youthful exuberance of spirits. I am sure when Bill grows older, he will understand that it cannot be desirable to see a fellow-creature, though a criminal, hurried from life to death."

"Then the blacks are also our fellow-creatures?" said Bill, half sulkily, half ashamed.

"Certainly," replied M'Donald, good-naturedly; "and, savage as they sometimes are, I have no doubt that if we were in their place, treated, or rather ill-treated, by another race as we ill-treat them, we should be much more violent, lawless, and even perhaps more cruel than they are."

"I think so too," said Mr. Powell. "Most settlers consider the blacks as little better than the wild dogs, and only increase the enmity and widen the gulf, which is already too wide."

"You stand on better terms with them, John," said Mrs. Powell to her husband, with satisfaction. "You never fire at them, nor set the dogs upon them; and I think this is the only reason that they have not molested us, or done us any injury."

"My dear child," replied her husband, with a shrug of the shoulders, "we must not rely upon that alone. I still trust more to the fear we inspire in them than to the gratitude which you think they owe to us. You must consider that I, as well as all other settlers, cause them the greatest injury that the white can inflict upon them. My being friendly with them personally, and not allowing my men to ill-use them, cannot make amends for this. With our flocks we have expelled them from their hunting-grounds, with our dogs we have driven their game, their kangaroos, emus, and wallobis from the river into the malley bushes. Nay, what is worse, we have driven the various tribes, which are all hostile to each other, into a small compass; so that bloodshed has raged among them ever since. The blacks never will, nor can, forget these things; nor are they of a forgiving disposition. Of course, those who add personal provocation to all these things, have only themselves to blame for the consequences."

"I suppose you know," said M'Donald, "that a tribe of them are encamped by the side of the river, scarcely half an hour's walk from here?"

"Indeed!—No, I was not aware of that," said Mr. Powell, smiling; but I could have easily guessed as much. We shall have their fires quite near this evening, and be able to see their carroberies.* Where provisions are, you may depend upon it the blacks will not be far off. As the bird of prey, or wild dog scents carrion in the forest, so do these cunning fellows discover when fresh provisions have arrived; they know very well something will fall to their share."

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and at the master's "Walk in!" the head stock-keeper, Mr. Bale, appeared at the threshold. After greeting the family, as well as the stranger, he announced that a tribe of the Rufus blacks —the same that had encamped in the neighbourhood the preceding year, and had taken half a dozen sheep with them when they left—seemed inclined to put up their gunyoes† near the station.

"Oh! they have got here already," said M'Donald, laughing: "they must have followed close upon my track."

"Yes, the black rascals soon come when they smell tobacco or bread," said the stock-keeper. "Shall we let them come near the station, sir? I think it would be as well to keep them at a distance."

"Of how many does their party consist?" asked Mr. Powell. "Not very many," was the reply: "about ten men, and fifteen or sixteen women and children. The old cripple is with them too, and moves on his hands as well as ever. The fellow is tough as untanned skin."

"The poor man," said Mrs. Powell, as her sons had gone out to have a look at the blacks. "Do not disturb them, John. They will not stay long, and I am sure it must do them good to see human habitations again, and to be allowed to encamp near them."

"Do not fancy that, ma'am," replied the stock-keeper. "The rascals hate the white man's house, as much as they do the white man himself. If they happen to find an abandoned hut, they will sooner encamp in the open air than go in; aye, even when the rain is pouring down in torrents. If they do go in for a few moments, it is only to see whether they can find anything to steal: they turn everything to

* Dances of the blacks.

† Gunyo, the roof of bark of the huts of the Australian aborigines.

account. If I had my way—but, no matter—— What shall we do with them, sir?"

"Let them alone," said Mr. Powell, good-naturedly; "if they grow troublesome we can easily get rid of them. Here is a letter that has come for you, Mr. Bale," continued Mr. Powell, going to the table—"two, I see—and, if you wish to have a look at the papers this evening, they are at your disposal."

"Thank you, sir," replied the man, taking the letters with apparent indifference, and putting them into his pocket, after a hasty glance at the address. But his eyes glistened, and his rough sunburnt countenance, which his short beard rather improved than concealed, beamed with an expression of pleasure. They were letters from home. Who could have resisted that charm? "Wool has risen, sir, I hear," said he, preparing to leave; "and horses, too, are said to fetch a good price. What do you think of taking a lot down, as soon as the grass gets up a little? What other people do we can do also, and we need not be ashamed of showing our horseflesh on the Adelaide market."

"I have already thought of it myself, Mr. Bale," answered Mr. Powell; "at any rate, we shall run no risk. Perhaps you know, Mr. M'Donald, how prices stood when you left Melbourne?—my information is somewhat old."

"They stand very well indeed," replied the young man; "at least for those," he added, with a smile, "who have horses to sell. The buyers had to give high prices."

"An excellent grey you are riding, sir," said the stock-keeper, turning to the stranger. "May I ask what you paid for him? I beg your pardon," he added, seeing that the guest blushed slightly. "It does not matter what he cost, I only wished to know what you think he is worth now?"

"I will tell you what I paid for him, too," said M'Donald, laughing. "In the bush, and throughout the settlements, men are always ready to sell their horses, provided they can get a good price for them. But the question, how much a horse has cost, is rather a delicate one, and is very seldom answered truly, especially when the owner intends selling again. I am no horse dealer," continued M'Donald," and consequently do not wish to make a secret of the price I paid for mine. The grey cost me, including saddle and bridle, fifteen pounds."

"Not too much, perhaps, for a good horse," said the stock-keeper; "but, on an average, one cannot expect more than eight pounds per head. Was that the price asked?"

"It was the price offered, and the seller made no objection."

"I should think not: it is a very good price, but not too much. Can he leap?"

"Like a deer, and scarcely requires any water the whole day."

"An excellent horse for the bush; if I had a station of my own, I should ask you to let me have it."

"Well, when that takes place we shall perhaps make a bargain," said M'Donald, smiling.

"The sooner the better," replied Bale, with a bow, as he left the room. He had scarcely spoken a word to the ladies; only now and then his hasty glance sought their slender forms in the looking-glass, and he seemed to blush at his temerity.

After Bale had left the room, the conversation ran for a little while on horses, cattle, the price of wool—in short, the usual bush topics—enough to drive a man who takes no interest in these matters to desperation, until the ladies joined in, and turned it into another channel. Sarah unpacked the books, which fulfilled one of her favourite wishes.

The book hit by the bullet had not received any material damage. It was "Lalla Rookh." The bullet had only penetrated the binding, the title page, and the first few leaves of the "Veiled Prophet;" and the now harmless lead dropped out as Sarah opened the volume.

M'Donald picked up the bullet with a smile, examined it a moment, and was going to put it into his pocket, when Sarah placed her hand upon his arm and begged it of him as a present.

"It belongs to the book" she said, imploringly; "the present would not be complete if I were not allowed to keep the bullet."

M'Donald gazed at her long and earnestly, and at last the girl quailed before his steady look. He seemed unwilling to part with this worthless piece of lead. But at last he slowly stretched out his hand, gave her the bullet, and said, with a mournful expression: "Well, take this bullet, Miss Powell. It is, perhaps, better I should give it away, or it might again prove dangerous to me."

"Are you superstitious?" asked Sarah, taking the bullet and looking at him with a smile.

"A little," replied M'Donald. "I am passionately fond of the chase, and half a sailor; and it is well known that sailors and hunters are all somewhat superstitious, they may deny it as much as they like. It is almost a necessary consequence of their pursuits."

"But now pray tell us," asked Mrs. Powell, "where in the world you have been all this time, and why you did not let us hear from you? You may believe me when I tell you how anxious we were about you, and that we were actually afraid some misfortune had befallen you on your way; in fact, that you had met with ill-usage either from the bushrangers or the blacks."

"Well, I scarcely know where I have been and where not," answered M'Donald. "My plan was, as you know, to settle down somewhere as a squatter and establish my own home. On my way to Melbourne I accidentally heard of a magnificent country for cattle farmers, a paradise for sheep and cattle—rumours of well-watered pasture-grounds, which are as common in the bush as in the towns—rumours of newly-discovered coal-mines, which afterwards turn out to have no more solid foundation than the brains of an enthusiast or a swindler. In spite of this, and in spite of all my previous experience in this respect, I allowed myself to be led astray and to follow the false track, and spent a long, tedious, and wretched time in the Malley bush, along with two persons, my companions in misfortune. The blacks soon got upon our tracks; and it was only with great difficulty that we at last escaped the double danger of starvation and their wooden spears, with which one of my companions received a tolerably severe, although not mortal wound."

"In what part of the country was that?" asked Mr. Powell, who, as a settler, took a special and very natural interest in this information concerning new pasture-grounds.

"Between the Hindmarsh and the Curon Lake," replied M'Donald.

"I always thought some good runs would be discovered there," said Mr. Powell, starting from his seat. "And did you find nothing at all?"

"Oh, yes! plenty of blacks; but not a drop of water, either for us or our animals, excepting when we returned to the

Hindmarsh to fill our water-bottles and to rest the horses."

"Then you have not penetrated sufficiently far inland. I am firmly convinced there must be an old water-course and some good land somewhere between those two lakes. I wish I had been with you!"

"Be thankful you were not," replied M'Donald, gravely. "I would not live that time over again."

"And have you given up the idea of finding suitable pasture-grounds?" Mrs. Powell asked, with much interest, "or have you come this way for that purpose?"

"That is a much more indiscreet question than that of Mr. Bale with reference to the price of the horse," said Mr. Powell, laughing. "You know, my dear child, that a new settler keeps nothing in the world so secret as the direction in which he intends to look out for pasture-grounds."

"Yes, towards any *other* settler," said M'Donald, offering the old gentleman his hand, which the latter shook cordially. "But to you I can say that it is my intention to look out for pasture-grounds somewhere about the Murray, although the best places are already occupied."

"I assure you that there is nobody I should prefer having for my neighbour to you," replied Mr. Powell. "It only too frequently happens that we get a class of men among the settlers in our neighbourhood who are not only so far below us in education, but even in good behaviour, that, with the best intentions, we cannot possibly associate with them, although we cannot avoid occasional intercourse. Nothing would therefore be more agreeable to us, and tend so much to improve our position. There will be plenty of room left for our herds. The country is large; and when they have increased so much as to force us to look out for another run, I have no doubt we shall find one. Children, too, mostly scatter as soon they have reached the right age, and get fledged. Come, let us drink to our good fellowship, Mr. M'Donald!" he added, as Sarah, who, at a signal from her mother, had gone away, returned with a bottle of sherry and a few glasses, which Mr. Powell filled, and offered one to his guest.

"With all my heart!" replied the young man, with a deep sigh, and emptied his glass.

A loud "Coo-eeh!"—the usual call of the blacks, which

many of the whites inland have also appropriated—was heard outside.

"Ah! there are our black guests already," said Mr. Powell, laughing. "I was certain they would not be long before they availed themselves of the permission to come to the station. On the whole, they never commit any mischief, except in departing; as long as they remain at the station, they are very careful not to touch property which is not theirs."

"By doing so at their departure, it seems to me they expose themselves to a somewhat rough reception if they visit the place again," said M'Donald.

"They never think of that," returned Mr. Powell. "Nevertheless, they have among themselves some sort of a moral code of laws, however light their principles may be. But, from what I have seen of them during the course of a long experience, I should be inclined to believe they have among themselves a sort of right of *prescription* respecting such petty, or even more serious misdemeanours, in virtue of which an unpleasant occurrence is not spoken of after the lapse of a certain number of months. Thus, I have known several cases in which blacks, after having murdered a white man, suddenly disappeared, and all endeavours to discover their whereabouts proved unavailing. After the lapse of six months they turned up, perfectly unconcerned—in fact, ran into the hands of the police, as if they had had nothing to do whatever with bloodshed and murder. Some of them have thus voluntarily, or rather unconsciously, surrendered into the hands of offended laws, and, when first examined, seemed to be very indignant that an affair already 'six moons' old should be stirred up."

"This would certainly give me a key to many transactions of theirs," observed M'Donald. "But will you not come and see them? To tell you the truth, it occurred to me to-day, as I rode past the tribe, whether I might not persuade two or three of these fellows to accompany me into the bush, to look out for cattle-runs."

"I should not advise you to have anything to do with them," Mr. Powell remarked, seriously.

"For God's sake, do not trust them!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell. "They are all, even the best of them, treacherous;

and depend upon it that, in spite of obligations you may have conferred upon any one of them, it will not be safe for you, when you are alone, to stand with your back turned towards him. If he has his club in his hands, he *cannot* resist the temptation of murdering you."

"There is certainly a great deal of truth in what you say," Mr. Powell observed. "In the district of Sydney, then much wilder than now, where I commenced sheep farming, I had for a neighbour a Scotchman. He was a very great friend of the blacks, and always had about him a black lad, of sixteen years of age, whose life he had saved when a mere child; and, indeed, this lad showed much more attachment to him than I had ever seen exhibited by a black. Once they were together in the wood cutting down a tree. Suddenly the black came running to the station alone, and with a bloody axe in his hand, wailing and lamenting, and, with the most unfeigned signs of repentance and grief, accused himself of having murdered his master. According to his own evidence, he had *not*, while standing near him with his axe in his hands, *been able* to resist the temptation of striking him as he turned his back. The blow produced instant death: and the black was at first quite beside himself with the idea that he had killed his benefactor. They were going to imprison him for this deed, but he found means to escape, and was never seen again in those parts."

"These are isolated cases," replied M'Donald. "I know, on the other hand, instances of blacks proving honest and faithful, for a short period at least; whether it would be advisable to trust them in the long run, I really cannot tell. But do not be uneasy on my account. Were I to take a black with me into the bush, I should choose my man, and mind to make it his interest to remain faithful to me."

"If you can do that, you are safe," said Mr. Powell, laughing, putting on his straw hat. "Now, if you have no objection, we will go over to the blacks, who are already putting up their gunyoes and lighting their fires, if I am not mistaken. We shall be back by dinner-time."

Taking his guest by the arm, Mr. Powell led him across the open space before the house, and went in the direction of a copse adjoining the outer buildings, whence the hacking of the tomahawks and the wild yelping of dogs announced the presence of the blacks.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACKS.

At the distance of scarcely four hundred paces from Mr. Powell's homestead, on the banks of the Murray, the bush commenced. Large gum-trees, standing alone, were scattered about, as in a park; the ground was trodden down sufficiently to allow no grass to grow; whilst here and there a low underwood called the "tea-bush"—for what reason remains a mystery—formed of stiff and broomy shrubs, grew up in small tufts. The height of the tree would of itself have shown the proximity of water, even had the merry and metal-like "ting-ting" of the remarkable little bell-bird, whose presence is always the surest indication of water, not been heard among the branches.

Close to this somewhat narrow line of woods, stretching out in the direction of the Malley hills, was a low, sandy, and almost bare elevation, which formed the western limit of the station. Under this, and sheltered by the gum-trees, the above-mentioned tribe were busily engaged stripping the bark off the thick trunks of the trees, and putting it up to shelter themselves.

The two gentlemen had about one-third of the distance still to accomplish, when a pack of dogs, that looked more like living skeletons than anything else, rushed at them from the bushes, barking furiously, and filling the forest with their wolf-like howls. These dogs belonged to the blacks; and it would certainly have been impossible to have brought together in any other part of the world a more motley set of worthless, half-starved, mangy, bare-boned curs. It was a problem how they could live at all; the blacks scarcely found food enough for themselves and their families in the forest. Kangaroos began to be extremely scarce in this part of the bush; and if the half-starved animals did not now and then succeed in surprising a dingo or a wild dog, the very skin, and even coat of which they demolished, they would have had no other resource but to do as their masters did in time of need—that is, to single out one from among their fellows, and kill and devour him.

The dogs are useful to the blacks, inasmuch as they assist them in hunting the opossum, the walloby, and sometimes a kangaroo, of which they may, *perhaps*, get the entrails. When this fails, they have, like their masters, to dig their food out of the ground, and make a repast upon worms and grubs, or live on air.

Mr. Powell and his companion stood still, and each seized a stick, to defend themselves against any attack from these animals, while the former looked round for his own dogs. George, who had again ridden down the river, had taken them with him. The blacks quickly perceived their white visitors; besides, they knew the master of the station, and suddenly, as if rising out of the ground, five or six young lads appeared in the midst of the dogs, throwing at them their boomerangs, or pieces of wood they snatched up, with such success, that the howling troop scattered in all directions, with their tails between their legs, leaving the passage free for the white men.

Although the blacks had been but a very short time in their present station, their camp was already put up. The men had torn the bark off the nearest gum-trees in large sheets, by the aid of the small hatchets with which some of them were provided. The women dragged these sheets of bark to the place selected, put three or four of them on the windward side, in such a manner that they terminated in a point. Against this point, somewhat inclined, a pole of about seven feet in length was fixed, in an oblique direction, so as to form a sort of roof, and camp, bed, and house were completed.

These sheets of bark, it is true, only protected the occupants against the inroads of wind and weather upon one side, and the burning rays of the mid-day sun. The bare earth, seldom covered even with an opossum cloak, served as bed. But little did the hardy children of these desolate gum-forests, accustomed as they are to face wind and weather, care about this. So that they had wherewith to fill their bellies, of whatever nature the food might be, they were satisfied, and troubled themselves little about the rest.

As soon as they had driven their dogs away from the owner of the station, they took no further notice of him. They had been allowed to pitch their camp here, and the rest followed as a matter of course. Moreover, they had still

plenty to do to put their night quarters in order; and as soon as the sheets of bark were duly arranged, fires were lighted before each separate gunyo, apparently for the purpose of preparing their meals, although, with the exception of a walloby and two opossums, no provisions were to be seen.

The Australian forest or "bush" is a melancholy home for the black, and furnishes him with little besides firewood and bark, to protect himself against the inclemency of the weather. It scarcely produces any wild fruits. The few productions which, in shape or colour, resemble fruit, are not fit to eat; for they are either as hard as wood, and quite as dry, or woolly and insipid. To the first sort belongs the Australian pear; to the second the raspberry. The Australian cherry, which has its stone outside, at the upper extremity, is also a small, insipid, and entirely worthless berry. This list completely exhausts the bush fruits of the southern half of Australia. The natives are naturally reduced to make up in the world of insects what the forest denies them in fruit, and larvæ and beetles, worms, grubs, and caterpillars are never safe against their hunger. A species of acacia furnishes them also with a nutritious resin, which is chiefly gathered by the women, who carry it with them in nets. In addition to this, their chief staple of food consists of a species of ice-plant, furnished with small triangular and fleshy leaves, something like a file, and it preserves its sappy stalk even during the season of greatest drought. Here and there, in marshy places, other roots and cabbage-like plants are found, which they gather very carefully for their consumption. On the whole, they eat everything which comes in their way, and the gum-trees would be much barer, and present a more desolate appearance, if their leaves were not protected by a sharp, oily taste from the voracity of either man or brute.

These gunyoes, or tents of bark, were apparently erected under the trees without any regard to order. Their roofs all pointed in the direction from which the wind blew. Only one seemed to be raised more carefully than the rest. Its roof was somewhat lower, quite circular, with a small opening in front. This gunyo was separated from the others, and the dogs seemed to stand in special awe of it, describing a wide circle when they passed near it.

In this gunyo lived one of the most remarkable beings to be found among the native tribes. He was a cripple, reduced

to this state by a strange disease, peculiar to the Australian continent. The flesh of the arms and legs—usually of one arm or of one leg—disappears from under the skin, giving the diseased limb the appearance of a skeleton covered with Indian rubber. This disease might be called a negative elephantiasis, so opposite are its effects, yet so singular its causes.

The latter is prevalent amongst the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, the origin of both being ascribed to lying upon the damp ground. It is, however, strange that the same cause should produce such different results in two countries not far distant from each other, or, at least, washed by the same sea: in the one, a swelling of the legs and arms to the thickness of the body, whereby the skin is stretched like that of a drum; in the other, the entire disappearance of the flesh, accompanied with a drying up of the muscles and sinews, whilst the shrunken skin closely and firmly adheres to the bones.

The blacks attribute this to supernatural agencies, and to evil spirits prowling about in the silence of the night, and with greedy lips sucking the blood of the unfortunate whose fire has gone out. If but one limb, either arm or leg, is attacked, as is usually the case, the patient on whom the evil spirit is supposed to exercise his power, goes through life pretty smoothly, and does not seem to care any more about the accident than his neighbour of the South Sea of legs swollen almost to bursting.

But the black belonging to this tribe was visited more severely than common, and had been deprived by the evil spirit of the use of both his legs. He could neither walk nor stand. Although the upper part of his body, as far as the hip-bone, was perfectly sound, and even seemed to be strong and powerful: with a broad, arched chest and muscular arms, his legs were shrunk like those of a skeleton. He was forced to move upon his hands, which he did without much apparent difficulty, placing his legs crosswise over each other. During long marches, his tribe assisted him by carrying him, when the ground permitted, on a sheet of bark, which, being drawn by the women, considerably aided his progress.

Cripples, especially the blind, do not by any means stand in high estimation amongst the blacks. This indeed is sufficiently shown by the whole tenour of their political life, in consequence of which the oldest and *strongest* men are selected

for chieftains and rulers, whilst the others are required to pay them unconditional obedience. In the case of this unfortunate man, however, who even seemed deprived of the power of providing his subsistence, circumstances were greatly different; the tribe not only showed him the utmost consideration and attention, but almost considered him as a being of a higher sort—at least, as one who stood in close relationship with the spirits.

He certainly possessed uncommon abilities. His tribe came but rarely in contact with white men, yet he had learned enough of their language to speak it well, and even fluently. Whether for this reason, or on account of his intercourse with the spirits of the night, with whom, according to the natives, he was in constant communion, and whose will he made known to his tribe, he had received the name of Nguyulloman—*i. e. the interpreter;* with the title of honour, Burka, *the old man.* No booty was brought to the camp, no fat kangaroo, no plump opossum, no ball of resin, or net of snow-white grubs, of which he did not receive his share, as a tribute to which he was entitled—as a mark of deference and duty.

Nguyulloman seemed to receive these attentions as a matter of course, and even exacted respect from his tribe. They were not allowed to stir, when, at night, under his solitary roof of bark, his deep hollow voice was sometimes heard chanting his incantations in the darkness of the forest. Nothing but the noise of the howling of the dogs was then heard, except his voice. They feared the cripple, who, whenever they approached within reach of his hut, threw stones and pieces of wood at them with unerring aim. Dismally did Nguyulloman's adjurations resound, as they mingled with the howl of the affrighted animals. The whole tribe would then await in anxious expectation the conclusion of his chant. No child durst cry; and only here and there some woman might be seen creeping timidly and carefully to the fire with wood, that the flame might not be extinguished. Should that happen, the dreadful Nokunno, who wanders about at night and attacks the unfortunates whose fires are extinguished, would have had them in his power.

Nguyulloman was sitting before his shed, on an opossum cloak spread for him, and attentively watching the operations of some children of the tribe who were busily engaged collect-

ing dry wood and placing it within his reach, that he might feed his fire himself. After dark, no one durst approach his hut unless summoned by him.

The two white men walked to this place, where some of the "burkas," or old men, assembled as soon as they noticed their approach, and were now quite safe from the dogs.

"Well, Nguyulloman," said Mr. Powell, who knew the cripple well, and had shown him many a kindness, "you are here again, I see. How have you been all this long time?"

"Good, master," answered the black. His pronunciation was remarkably pure. Indeed, all the Australian natives excel in their nice perception of foreign sounds. In this respect they differ from the African negro. They pronounce the foreign words which they remember as purely and distinctly as if they had been brought up from their childhood in the country where the language is spoken. "A thousand good, but tribe is poor,—has no more kangaroo, no more emu: white men have driven all away; and much war with Darling blacks; cruel blacks—have taken much butter.* Poor Rufus blacks are badly off."

"But in the malley-bush there are still plenty of kangaroos, Nguyulloman; and in the Murray plenty of fish and lobsters. Opossums are to be found everywhere; and wild dogs, which you like so much, are, I am sorry to say, but too plentiful."

"Where are they?" answered the cripple, shrugging his shoulders. "Your large kangaroo dogs drive them far away into the bush. Black man cannot find them,—lives on pig's face† and worms, and suffers from hunger—a thousand hunger."

"Well," said Mr. Powell, in a kind tone, "Nguyulloman shall at least not suffer from hunger to-day. I have allowed you to encamp on the station; and I hope that, during the short time you are here, you will behave well. I know Nguyulloman can *force* his tribe to do so, for he has power over them."

* Butter is the name given to all fat. In this case, in particular, *they* understand by it the kidney-fat of men, of which members of all the tribes despoil the vanquished and anoint themselves, guided by a common and highly dangerous superstition, for they believe that they shall thereby transfer to themselves the strength of their prostrate foe. Like the North American when he takes the scalp, a mere trophy of victory, they care very little whether their foe is alive or not, so that they obtain the fat which they deem so valuable.

† The afore-mentioned ice-plant.

A passing and scarcely perceptible smile stole over the cripple's features as, without raising his head, he looked at the white man from beneath his bushy eyebrows. At last he said, slowly:

"Nguyulloman shall not suffer hunger!"

"No, for I will tell my stock-keeper to mind that you receive three sheep, and as many dampers."*

"Butsheri!" said Nguyulloman, with evident satisfaction and sparkling eyes, shaking his head in a satisfied manner; "butsheri! no spear shall be thrown by us at your cattle. My young men shall eat neither thy cattle nor thy horses. Nguyulloman is waiting for the dampers!"

M'Donald laughed.

"The old fellow speaks in a very decided manner," he said, "and seems to think of his comfort before anything else. Indeed, this half skeleton is a frightful sight. The upper part, man in full force and vigour—half a giant, to all appearance—and below a disgusting carcass, covered with skin. He appears like a man peeping out of his grave!"

"His chest and arms are particularly powerful," replied Mr. Powell; "and it is easily accounted for by his having for so many years moved by their aid alone. Indeed, I never saw a more powerful or beautifully formed bust than his."

"Bless me! who is that?" cried M'Donald, as he cast his looks at the other natives, and perceived among them the form of a black, entirely naked, who stood at about ten paces from them, leaning on his long wooden spear, as if he were cut out of dark marble. He seemed to be about thirty years of age: his body was faultless; the structure of his limbs strong and well proportioned—his hand and foot even small and neat, whilst his eyes looked like two burning coals from under his silky, curly, raven hair. The most remarkable feature about him was his beard. It not only descended to his chest, but completely covered his neck, shoulders, and the upper part of his back. Thick as ivy grows upon a wall, this curly beard seemed to have crept over his shoulders, upon which it

* "Damper" is an Australian cake, which, in the bush, replaces bread. It consists of flour, water, and a little salt. The moistened flour is kneaded into a firm dough, rolled in a flat shape, and laid upon the hearthstone, cleared of ashes; or, if there be no hearthstone, on the ground where the fire has been burning, and it is covered with the hot ashes until it is done. It is not very digestible, as may easily be imagined; but people do eat it, and the blacks are passionately fond of it.

lay like a glossy cloak of fur. Such beards, although not extremely rare among the Australian blacks, are nevertheless not frequently met with in that State. They cover the whole of the neck and shoulders like a regular fur mantle, and give the wearer a peculiarly wild but picturesque appearance. Whether it was that the black was aware of the impression he had produced, he fastened his dark eye upon the strange white man, who, on his part, looked at him with astonishment.

"A fine specimen of an Australian black," said Mr. Powell, who had followed the look and outstretched arm of his guest; "and these two men—the one in his perfection, the other in his infirmity—peculiar to this country, might be considered as excellent representatives of the tribes. A couple of these black Eves added to the group, would make it complete."

"Kakurru!" cried M'Donald, without answering, and in the language of the natives. "How is it you are here, among the Rufus blacks? Have you left the wild marshes of Encounter Bay, and made peace with your old foes?"

"Kakurru has seen the eyes of the white man, and heard his voice," replied the black, "but his face has become a stranger to him: it has changed like the moon."

"Hallo, Mr. M'Donald!" cried Mr. Powell, amazed, "where in the world did you learn the language of this black fellow so well? Why, you speak it as fluently as a native!"

"Partly from a long residence amongst them, and partly from a natural capacity for the acquirement of languages," said M'Donald, smiling. "After all, their language is not difficult; and, with a little attention, one can easily learn enough of it to make one's self understood. But our countrymen, I am sorry to say, give themselves very little trouble to acquire this knowledge; and the result is that the blacks, considered so far below us intellectually, almost always shame us, and learn much more of our language than we do of theirs."

"You are right, certainly; but what are we to do with their jargon? It is to the interest of the blacks to understand us; much more so, indeed, than it is ours to make ourselves acquainted with their language; they therefore, naturally enough, take the trouble. At any rate, they can learn more of us than we of them. But do you know this fellow?"

"Yes; I once fell in with him at Encounter Bay, and even rendered him a service, I think. But he does not seem to recognise me. Then, I wore no beard."

During this conversation, Kakurru had not taken his eyes off the stranger, who had addressed him in his own tongue, for a single moment; and even the other blacks looked at him with astonishment. He was the first white man they had heard speaking the language of one of their tribes fluently.

"Make a light, poor lubra, ngarang damper!"* said a voice by their side. Looking to the place whence the sound proceeded, they saw one of the most horrible beings of these tribes—the greatest monstrosity of repulsive hideousness that human imagination could possibly fancy. This creature was a woman. Of what age, could not be ascertained; dirt and wrinkles disformed and concealed her features. Not the least bit of a garment concealed her nakedness: her hair hung entangled over the bony shoulders, and her bleared eyes gleamed as much with rage and hatred against the white as they besought compassion.

"This would be another specimen for your Australian menagery," said M'Donald, turning away from the old woman with disgust. "It is frightful, when we consider how deep man can sink: and what would our philosophers and orthodox persons say, if they had to class this picture of deformity among the 'lords of creation'!"

"Come away," said Mr. Powell suddenly; "I shall get sick if I look any longer at this hideous object. One would scarcely believe it possible for a human creature to sink to such a state of degradation."

"I will give you something," said M'Donald, turning to the woman, to quiet her. Casting his eye once more on the bearded black, who had remained motionless at his place, without taking his gaze off the white man, he returned with Mr. Powell towards the house.

They had scarcely taken a dozen paces, when Kakurru, with his spear in his right hand, slowly and carefully followed them. He kept his eye upon the tracks which the young man had left in the dry clay and sand, until he came to a place where they were imprinted clearly and distinctly. Here he stood still, stooped down a few minutes to examine them carefully, measured them with his hand, by laying his

* In the corrupt language, used as a means of communication between the white and the black, "make a light" means *to see*; "lubra" is the Australian word for *woman*; "ngarang" means *small*; "butsheri," *good*; "flour-bag," *white*; "jump up," *to come, to appear*; "to sit down," *to be somewhere*; "yanna-way," *gone away*, &c. &c.

knuckles on them in a peculiar manner, and suddenly started up with a smile of triumph upon his features, and rushed after the white men, whom he overtook in a few bounds. M'Donald hearing the steps behind him, turned round quickly. As he saw Kakurru he halted, and said to him, with a smile—"Well, my friend, what do you want?"

"Jack!" replied the black, stretching out his left hand towards him, "Jack—certainly!"

"Well, well," said M'Donald, as a slight blush spread over his countenance, "it appears my beard has, after all, not concealed my face from you."

"Beard yes, but feet no," answered the black, smiling, as he pointed to the tracks. "When Kakurru has seen them once, he knows them."

"What does he say?" asked Mr. Powell, perplexed.

"He recognised me by my foot-tracks," replied M'Donald. "One would scarcely deem it possible."

"Oh, yes!" replied Mr. Powell, "it is astonishing how clever the blacks are at this; and, indeed, they sooner notice the tracks of a man than his features. But their continual wars render it absolutely necessary for them, when they find tracks, to be able to distinguish those of their friends from those of their foes. He seems to wish to speak to you."

"I shall see you soon, Kakurru," said M'Donald, without replying to Mr. Powell's observation, continuing his walk without taking any further notice of the black.

Meantime everything was astir in the camp of the natives. The women gathered wood, as if they were going to entrench themselves against the attack of a hostile tribe, whilst the men reclined upon the ground awaiting what was to come. The sheep had been promised, and must come; and come they did, but not quite so comfortably as they had imagined. Half an hour might have elapsed, when Mr. Bale, the stock-keeper, rode up to their camp, and in a frightful jargon of English and Australian, claiming no relationship whatever to any language, requested half-a-dozen men to go with him to the house to receive the destined presents. Some of the blacks seemed inclined to send the women, as they considered such occupation beneath their dignity. But Nguyulloman decided the case. He was hungry, and was afraid the women would be too long about it. He therefore ordered three of the young men and four women to do Mr. Bale's bidding, and to

bring the promised provisions to the camp as soon as possible. This was done after a short delay. The young men returned in ten minutes, with wild and triumphant bounds, each carrying a sheep upon his shoulders. The women followed, somewhat more slowly, with the dampers; and they at once slaughtered the animals, in which proceeding they showed great skill.

In the first place, Nguyulloman received all the kidneys. He threw them upon the charcoal, and devoured them, with half a damper, before the rest had done skinning and cutting up the animals. This first meal did not prevent him from despatching, afterwards, twice as much meat as any of the rest.

It is astonishing what quantities of food a black will manage to swallow at one sitting; you can actually see their bellies swelling like well-filled sacks. But afterwards they will fast just as long, and, to keep the rebellious stomach in order, they tighten their hempen or bast rope, which they frequently wear about their bare bodies, thus making it serve as a hunger belt. The meat and the rest of the provisions were divided by the "burkas," or old men, into shares for the different classes, according to age and sex. No nation on the face of the globe possesses so many and such strict laws on this subject as the natives of every part of Australia.

Certain articles of food, certain parts of animals or fish, are only eaten by particular members of the community, and are forbidden to the rest, varied reasons being assigned for this strange custom. Transgressors of these rules are supposed to grow weak and old before their time: their muscles and sinews are said to lose their strength, and they are exposed to attacks of mortal disease. Age generally forms the boundary-line, but not always. There is this characteristic, that the "burkas," or chiefs, who made these laws, are alone allowed to eat of everything; and have, of course, reserved for themselves the best pieces. These laws are very strictly enforced, and, for the most part, by means of superstitious threats.

When all was settled, and the meat ready, these reckless children of the wilderness gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the meal as greedily as if a similar repast had been promised them every day. They troubled themselves very little for the morrow, allowing each day to take care of itself.

The dogs also regaled themselves, probably the first opportunity for so doing that had presented itself for a long time. They then threw themselves down on their backs by the fires. Nguyulloman had already set the example, and towards evening nothing was visible but the dark forms of the women, heaping up wood near the gunyoes, to keep the fires alight during the night.

"We shall have time," said Mr. Powell to M'Donald, after dinner, "to take a short ride before the evening sets in. I wish to go over to my next sheep station, in order to settle some small matters. If you will accompany me, we can take the dogs, and may, perhaps, start a dingo on our return.

"With all my heart; but I am afraid my horse is rather tired to-day."

"Oh, he must rest, of course. There are plenty of horses in the paddock, and you can ride one of mine. You will, at the same time, see more of the bush in this part, and I can also show you a few fine flocks of sheep."

"When do we start?"

"At once. I felt pretty certain of your assent to the proposal, and ordered the horses to be got ready before dinner. My man is waiting for us with the animals."

The friends went to the spot at which the horses stood impatiently champing their bits, and quickly vaulted into the saddle. Mr. Powell summoned his dogs by a shrill whistle, and a few minutes afterwards they were riding at full speed towards the pathless bush, followed by their barking and yelling dogs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BUSH.

THE newly-arrived immigrant in the United States of North America is frequently tantalized with the "far west," which he seeks to reach by railway, steamer, or on horseback, still following the sun. The farther west he goes, the more the "far west" seems to retire before him; and this is the case even in the endless forests west of the Mississippi. In the marshes, where no trace is seen but that of the hunter and the game he is pursuing, he still says he is going *to the west*, because

bears are getting scarce, and buffaloes may be classed among the natural curiosities of the locality.

Exactly the same kind of thing happens to the newly-arrived stranger in the Australian *bush*, although he need not go so far in search of it. The inhabitants of Sydney, or of one of the other seaports, are apt to denominate whatever is situated beyond the precincts of their townships as *bush*. But the traveller soon discovers, as he journeys onward, that it lies farther off; and at the stations in the wildest parts of the interior, the squatters do not consider whatever is within the precincts of their fences or roads—that is to say, cart-tracks—to be bush. Beyond that boundary, at least, they cannot deny that it exists. There, indeed, commences that dreary solitude of sand and malley-bushes, prickly grass, and salt-bush, and whatever may be the names of the monstrosities of Australian vegetation.

Vast, fearfully vast and endless distances stretch out in hills and plains; but without the pleasant and definite character usually imparted to a country by undulating scenery. Not a drop of water flows through these wastes; no clear brook bubbles along the valleys, offering to the hunter or wanderer a fixed and definite course which he can follow as a guide out of these wastes. As the waves of the sea, to which the word of the Almighty has assigned their place, spread out in all directions, so, for hundreds of miles, do the malley-bushes extend over desert salt tracts, upon which even the native blacks dare not venture. Heat, and a fine, salt, sandy dust, threaten to deprive the traveller of his sight; and no water is to be found to save the exhausted wanderer from a miserable death. With camels it might, *perhaps*, be possible to penetrate for some distance into this desert; but, under existing circumstances, the attempt would be useless, and such experiments have already led to a sacrifice of many lives. If some habitable oasis does exist in the interior, it could scarcely be turned to any account, even if once reached. It must certainly be unfit for cultivation. The hot wind which blows from the interior is sufficient to burn up all vegetation of the distant colonies, over which it passes with its withering breath: and much less could its processes go on under its influence, in spite of any amount of labour or any sacrifice. The want of water is another evil. Even in the wooded and mountainous parts of Australia, in the Blue Mountains, and

other excellent woodlands, water is scarce. That obtained from most of the wells dug by the hand of man has a salt taste. Can there be any ground to hope that it would be better in those deserts of sand and salt, where one does not even meet with the *bed* of a river, which might be received as an indication that a source once sent its waters from those solitudes to the sea?

The Australian settlers, therefore, establish their stations in the malley-bush, always keeping in the neighbourhood of the Murray river, to provide against the scarcity of water. They drive their flocks into the malley-bushes in search of grass, which grows there very thinly, it is true, but sweet—the wild oats, and particularly the salt-bush, which flourishes in the plains, and suits the sheep so well.*

The shepherd's hut was situated in the bush, near a small creek, in which water collected during the rainy season, but the bed of which was empty, and exhibited the dry and cracked clay soil. The hut was a plain structure raised on the trunks of young firs, the walls and roof being formed of broad sheets of gum-bark. It was scarcely provided with more comforts than the gunyo of the black. indeed, the only difference seemed to be, that in the hut the fire-place was dug out inside, while the smoke ascended through the roof. In the corner stood a bed of sheep-skins, over which an opossum cloak was thrown. The kitchen utensils consisted of a few tin pots and one iron pan. Some articles of wearing apparel and a gun hung upon some pegs fixed to the posts, indicated that this was a dwelling-place belong-

* The malley-bush is too important a product of the Australian wilderness to be passed over without a short description, especially as, in the hills, it determines the peculiar character of the desert and the scenery. It belongs to the species of Eucalypti, of which it fully possesses the shape, hardness, and oleaginous foliage. It never grows into a tree, like the gigantic gum-trees of the same family, but always as a bush, sending forth all its shoots from a common root. These, at the bottom, often strike out horizontally, but soon resume a perpendicular direction. The colour of the branches is much more lively than that of the gum-tree, being reddish at the top. The leaves look more sappy, and are of a fresher colour; and at the top spread out in the shape of a roof, the props being bare and smooth. The blacks make their long lances and spears out of these. The most remarkable part of this bush is the roots, which in some species of malley, especially those which grow in the most sandy and arid districts, are so wonderfully sappy, that the blacks dig them up, and, after breaking them, collect an extremely clear water which they yield into pieces of bark. Some of these tribes, the so-called "Malley blacks," who live far from any stream, are in summer time mainly and solely dependent upon this source for their drinking-water.

ing to white men. In the front of the hut, in the shade of a fine malley-fir—probably left for this purpose—a man reclined: it was the so-called "hut-keeper," a personage subordinate to the shepherd, whose duty it is to watch during the night over the sheep in the yard, and who, in the day-time, has nothing to do but to prepare the simple morning and evening meals. This man seemed to be one of the worst specimens of the lower class of white men in Australia. He was filthy and ragged: his old hat of cabbage-palm looked as if it had been used more than once as a pillow: it was completely crushed, and fragments of it hung down over his forehead. His hands and feet betrayed but too plainly the scarcity of water in these regions, in which all the drinking water for the men had to be brought from the chief station: of course, to waste any in washing operations was out of the question. With his head propped upon his left hand, he was reading, strangely enough, in a small well-thumbed book lying open before him. So deeply absorbed did he seem to be by its contents, that he did not hear the noise of the approaching horses until his dog, sunning himself by his side, and looking just as lazy as his master, raised his head slowly and gave a low growl.

At this moment Mr. Powell and his companion came up to the open space before the hut, dismounted, and fastened their horses to the branches of a malley-bush.

The hut-keeper rose quickly on recognising his master, whilst his dog, a wretched mongrel cur, retreated, whining, at the approach of the mighty big-boned kangaroo dogs, and sought protection under the feet of the only man likely to afford it.

"Well, Miller, how are you?" said Mr. Powell, walking slowly up to the man. "Where is Hendricks with the sheep?"

"On the other side of the fir creek, sir, near the dry marsh. He thought the grass was better there."

"Then we passed him, and shall find him on our return. Nothing happened here? Lost no sheep?"

"No, sir."

"No lambs yet?"

"They are just beginning to come, but the grass looks very bad. It would be a good thing if we could get some rain."

During this conversation, M'Donald approached the place

where the man had been reposing, and took up the book, out of mere curiosity, to see what kind of reading a man of this sort would choose. He had, however, scarcely cast a glance at it, when he called out, in the greatest astonishment, "Homer, by all that's good, and in the original!"

"Does he read Homer? Indeed!" said Mr. Powell. "A divine shepherd, I suppose?"

At this discovery Miller's face was suffused with a deep blush: it could not be that he felt ashamed at being caught reading such a work: it must have been that his degraded position was rendered more apparent by this fact.

"Time hangs so very heavily in the bush," he stammered, in evident embarrassment, but immediately after bit his lips at having uttered the excuse. M'Donald could not help examining him more attentively; and soon perceived, in spite of the fifth and rags which covered him, that the wretched being before him had once seen better times, and that those hands had no doubt been accustomed to a very different kind of work from that of preparing food for the shepherd and placing hurdles for the sheep. On his left hand he still wore a ring, the pure gold of which neither dust nor dirt had been able entirely to conceal.

Mr. Powell had in the meantime gone to examine the hurdles, placed at about four hundred paces distant, and to see whether they were in good order. M'Donald was unable to take off his eyes from the shy and almost crouching form of the man standing before him. It almost seemed to him as if he must have seen those grey and dull eyes before—as if that voice were familiar to him. But where? His eventful life had led him through the bush in every direction, and brought him into contact with many individuals. How could he keep the features of all of them in his memory? Then the man before him looked so brutalized; the shell which covered him had become so coarse that it was very possible he might have met him before under better circumstances, and could not now recognise him.

He felt, however, that his fixed gaze was disagreeable to the man, who turned away his eyes with evident uneasiness, and even irritation.

"What countryman are you?" asked M'Donald, in a friendly tone.

"A German."

"I thought so—and your name?"

"Miller" (with some hesitation).

"From what part?" continued M'Donald, in the man's own language, which he spoke fluently.

"From Würtemberg," he replied, in English, as if not noticing the German he heard from the mouth of the stranger.

"From Würtemberg? You were not a shepherd in your own country?"

A wild—almost mocking—smile stole over Miller's features, and he seemed as if about to give a hasty and angry answer. Were such the case, he altered his mind, and after a moment's reflection, slowly and hesitatingly replied,

"No."

"Come, my dear friend," said Mr. Powell, returning from his examination; "we must not stay long. If we wish to call at the 'dry marsh,' we have not a moment to lose; and I wish particularly to speak to the shepherd this evening. Take good care of the sheep, Miller," he added, addressing the German while mounting his horse; "there is a tribe of blacks encamped near the station, and you may be sure that there are some more of them in the neighbourhood. Have you no dog but that cur?"

"Hendricks has one—Pollo."

"Well, that's a better animal. Good day!"

M'Donald, who was already in the saddle, nodded in a friendly way to the German, and the two horsemen soon left the bush behind them, and cantered through the open part of the forest.

"What a strange man that hut-keeper of yours is," said M'Donald, when the ground again allowed him to ride by the side of his companion; "neglected, and sunk in the lowest state of degradation, the fellow, in all his misery, is reading Homer. Might one not suppose that the man who feels such a want would also do something to preserve respectability in his outward appearance?"

"My dear friend," answered Mr. Powell, at the same time carefully avoiding the sharp points of the prickly grass, very plentiful where they were riding, "perhaps no place in the world exhibits such strange instances of degeneration and complete upsetting of all human relations as the bush in Australia. Indeed, it sometimes appears to me as if Providence had meant clearly to show us that it was not nature alone

in Australia that delights in paradoxes, but even humanity itself. Something similar exists in America, but not to such a degree as in Australia; for there people do not sink into the lowest state of human society, and become *hut-keepers* to a lazy shepherd. This occupation is the last refuge of all those wretched beings, who, in their old home, considered Australia as the land in which they had only to buy half a dozen sheep in order to become rich in the space of a few years. Every grade of society, every profession, almost every rank in Europe, have their unhappy representatives in the bark huts of the bush."

"It must be a frightful life," said M'Donald, with a sigh; "and, nevertheless——"

"After a time, many of them desire nothing better," said Mr. Powell, interrupting him. "This German, for instance, who is even said to have, somewhere about Australia, a family, rendered miserable by his faults, was formerly book-keeper at another station, and had gradually saved a hundred pounds, with which he intended, as he said, returning home. But he is addicted to drink, and this unhappy vice has spoiled all. He spent what he had, sank lower than the brute, and at last I took him as hut-keeper, more out of pity than for any use he can be to me. He is too lazy and careless even for this occupation; and I shall be glad to get rid of him again. When he came here at first he looked decent, but now he is entirely lost in filth and idleness. His hair hangs over his face; his beard grows as long as it chooses: indeed, I scarcely recognised him to-day."

"But how is that? The Germans are generally said to be good shepherds."

"Very possible; perhaps at home, when brought up to it; but not here in Australia, where, indeed, we get little but the scum of all parts of the world. It is strange, too, that the Germans seldom occupy themselves with the rearing of sheep and cattle, and rarely stay in the bush, unless compelled to do so."

He suddenly reined in his horse, which obeyed the least motion of the bridle, turned round, and rode back to a place where something extraordinary seemed to attract his attention.

"Those blacks have been here in the bush," said M'Donald, who had also turned round: "I noticed the tracks before."

"These rascally fellows are sneaking about," said Mr. Powell, "watching for an opportunity to make off with some sheep."

"Do you think you have anything to fear from them as long as this tribe is encamped near the station?" asked M'Donald.

"That will not deter them in the least," replied the settler, who, with knit eyebrows, was examining the track of a bare foot deeply imprinted into the sand. "Of course, the tribe I favour will not steal anything, or, at least, not so long as I provide for them; but I am sure there are others in the neighbourhood, and I should not be in the least degree surprised if our friends by the river sent them word where they will have the best chance of success. But I hear the bells of the sheep, and here is the man I am looking for. You will find him a genuine specimen of the Australian shepherd—a convict, with a 'pass,' or 'ticket-of-leave,' living in comfortable lodgings, and who has at last found the aim of his whole life. Hendricks is a real specimen of the whole class."

From the place where they stopped, on the summit of a small, thinly-wooded sand-hill, they could see, at a distance of about six hundred paces, a man stretched out under one of the solitary firs. When he heard the noise of the approaching horsemen, he merely turned his head in the direction, without, however, pausing in his occupation at the sight of his master. He was engaged in nothing less than playing upon a rusty old jew's-harp; his dog, a fine black boar-hound, reclined not far off, on the summit of a sand-hill, whence he could watch the whole flock.

"Well, Hendricks," said Mr. Powell, when they had ridden up to him, and after watching him for a few moments with a smile, "you take it coolly."

"The best way in the world, sir," replied he, removing the instrument from his mouth, wiping it, and putting it into his pocket; "and a very happy fellow is he who can do so."

"The waggons have come, Hendricks."

"The d—l!" he exclaimed, becoming suddenly animated, and jumping up—"any tobacco?"

"Of course. How are the sheep getting on;—any signs of disease yet?"

"None—all as sound as butter."

"Indeed! and the lambs?"

"Too early for them yet: the few that dropped died. Shall we get the rations to-morrow?"

"Yes, as early as possible; and keep an eye about you—we have tracked blacks in the neighbourhood. A small troop are also encamped at the station."

"Be d—d take them!" growled Hendricks.

"Look after your hut-keeper a little; I really believe the fellow sleeps at night as well as in the day-time."

"I think so, too," said the shepherd, laughing; "but that is his business. If I have my hands full of work during the day, I cannot be expected to watch him at night."

M'Donald laughed, and Mr. Powell, turning his horse away, said to him:

"Give the man who brings the rations to-morrow twelve of your best sheep; and if there is the least appearance of disease, send Miller at once to the station to let me know. You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the shepherd, sulkily;—"but don't forget to send me some tobacco. I'll be hanged if I have not been chewing all my pockets, and I have not a single place where I shall be able to put it."

"I will think of it;—but I wish you would drop your swearing."

"Ay, ay, sir; but what did I want to ask;—oh, have you any new jew's-harps?"

"I ordered them," replied Mr. Powell, laughing; "but I have not examined the things yet, and therefore do not know whether they have arrived; but I am almost sure they are there."

"Then I shall go over to-morrow evening myself and choose a few," said the man, evidently satisfied, and smiling complacently.

"Why, I think yours is still in very good order," said M'Donald.

"If you like, I will send you a few to-morrow morning," said Mr. Powell.

"No, thank you," answered Kendricks; "I must examine them myself. I want a few new ones, which play different tunes. I know all these."

"If that is the case," said Mr. Powell, laughing, "you

certainly must go yourself. But I am afraid you will not find what you want."

"That would be disagreeable," growled the shepherd.

"Well, good-bye. Keep an eye on the blacks and Miller, and look carefully after the sheep!" With these words, Mr. Powell gave his horse the spur, and proceeded homewards, followed by M'Donald.

"Keep my eyes everywhere," growled Hendricks, looking sulkily after the two horsemen, "for 25*l.* a-year, and no tobacco. I should like to know who that new cove is;—a new overseer, perhaps?—wouldn't be amiss. But what do I care?" he added, after a short pause, fixing his hat more firmly upon his head and taking his cloak from the ground, "there will be fresh tobacco to-morrow, and now I am going in. The beasts must have got their bellyful by this time, or at least they will not die of hunger until to-morrow morning. Here Pollo!—home!"

This was sufficient for the dog. The sagacious animal knew very well what it had to do. Barking loudly, he collected the sheep from their various retreats into the nearest open space, until he had gathered the whole flock, and then drove it past his master, in the direction of the hut. Hendricks stood still until they had all gone by, and was on the point of following, when he observed an ewe which had just lambed, and was staying behind with its helpless offspring.

"Poll!" cried Hendricks, pointing at the poor animal with his crook: "there!—Does not the beast know what to do?"

The dog ran towards the sheep, and barked at it once or twice. However unmercifully he might attack stragglers from the flock, the faithful animal now showed himself just as considerate, and looked from the lamb, scarcely able to stand, to his master, as if he wished to say: "Surely, you must have a little patience; I cannot drive the mother away from her young."

Hendricks seemed to be of a different opinion. The flock was already in motion, and he was impatient of delay. Uttering a tremendous oath, cursing sheep, dog, and everything else, he stepped towards the poor anxious ewe, which, as if suspicious of danger, looked up to him with fear, and stood between him and the lamb: he pushed it aside, and with a kick, accompanied by a blasphemous oath, destroyed this young life. The ewe hastened to the spot, bleating piteously, but the

lamb was dead. Whilst the mother bewailed the loss of her little one, Hendricks set the dog at her. Perhaps Pollo did not obey willingly, for, of the two, he undoubtedly had most feeling. But the lamb was dead: the shepherd was striking at the bleating ewe with his stick, and thus between them they drove the poor animal after the rest.

Had Mr. Powell witnessed this scene, Hendricks would, no doubt, have been dismissed at once. The latter, however, knew that he incurred no risk of detection. Before an hour could elapse, the wild dogs, which are always hovering about flocks and herds, would have found the lamb, and devoured it. Was it worth the trouble of staying in the bush half-an-hour longer for the sake of a single lamb?

When the two horsemen quitted the German, the latter followed them with fixed eyes, until the last sound of the hoofs had ceased; then he went into his hut, threw himself down upon the ground, buried his face in his hands, and remained in that posture for half-an-hour. Not a motion of his body betrayed that he was still alive.

"Hallo!—dead?" suddenly exclaimed a rough and strange voice: at the same time the end of a thick and heavy bush boot came in contact with the German's side, who raised his head in astonishment, and jumped upon his feet.

"Well, plenty of life left, I see," said the new-comer, laughing, "to become very dangerous to half a leg of mutton, and three or four quarts of tea. How are you, old cove? who are these two men that have just been passing on horseback?"

"Who are you, if I may ask?" the German said, instead of replying to the questions of the new-comer, whom he examined with a scrutinizing glance. Indeed, his appearance fully justified this precaution. Although people in the bush made but small pretensions to anything like neatness of exterior, this intruder did not even seem to be a common bundleman. He looked much more like a highwayman, than one coming to the station to seek honest occupation.

His head was bare, and his long, matted, dark-red hair was bound Indian fashion, with a band of bast. His beard, of the same colour as his hair, had not felt the razor for months. The upper part of his body was covered with a tattered opossum cloak, and on his back he carried just such another garment, carefully rolled up, and apparently a new one. His

legs were encased in a pair of old torn trowsers, terminating in fringes, the result of long wear and contact with thorns. His unstockinged feet were, however, slipped into a pair of strong and new boots. Slung over his left shoulder, he carried a net, like those used by the blacks to carry the resin of the acacia, or other delicacies; and it contained a copper powder-flask, a leathern bag, and a small parcel. In his right hand he grasped a handsome double-barrelled gun, as much in contrast with his old worn-out clothes, as a pair of epaulettes would be upon the shoulders of a beggar.

"Where do I come from, mate?" exclaimed the intruder, with a laugh, leaning with his left arm upon the gun; "why, from the bush, as you can see, and I am looking out for the nearest head station, to obtain employment. Any chance here?"

"Cannot tell," Miller answered, dryly.

"But who were those two swells on horseback?" continued the stranger, lookly abstractedly at the traces left by the hoofs in the soft ground.

"One of them is the master of the station, the other a stranger, whom I do not even know myself."

"Hem! Up or down?"

"You mean the river?"

"Yes."

"I don't know, and don't much care."

"You are not an Englishman?"

"No,—a German."

"And—have not been long in the country?"

"About six years."

"Hem! Where is the shepherd?"

"Out; but he will soon be back with the sheep. You have a good gun there."

"Yes, pretty fair; it seldom misses its aim, and when one is alone in the bush, such a companion is very useful. Any blacks near?"

"Some arrived at the station to-day; at least, so Mr. Powell said."

"There are tracks all over the bush. Not felt anything of them yet?"

"Not yet. Put down your bundle; you won't go any further to-day?"

"Thanks. I should not like to fall into the hands of these black rascals after dark."

The stranger took off his opossum cloak, placed his gun in a corner, close to the place where the German had been reposing; and while the latter went into the other hut to get some tea ready, he threw himself upon the bed. Catching sight of the book, he took it up, but immediately threw it away again with contempt, stretched himself at full length, and made himself as comfortable, and seemed as much at home, as if he had been the owner of the place. There was, he knew, no doubt about his welcome; and for the rest he cared but little. Nowhere in the world does one meet with such unbounded hospitality as in Australia. At least, such was the case before the gold discoveries, which have so much increased the cost of the necessaries of life as to prevent the majority from practising hospitality as before. Certain provisions used to be added to the rations of the men for that purpose; and the traveller, whether afoot or on horseback, who managed to reach a human habitation at evening, had no occasion to ask whether he might spend the night there: this followed as a matter of course. Whenever these shepherds or hut-keepers, even if they belonged to the lowest class of human society—and to some curses were as familiar as household words—saw a stranger in the distance, they immediately put the tin quart pot of tea to the fire, took the damper from the shelf, and cut off a steak or chop for his supper. Nothing could have given them greater offence than to offer money on leaving.

The stranger knew this. He reposed for some time with that expression of pleasure upon his face which one feels on being able to rest after long exertion. It never entered his head to offer to assist his host in preparing the simple meal; that was his business; as for himself, all he could be justly called upon to do, was to despatch it.

When tea was ready, and the steak done, Miller called his guest, who at once commenced operations. While engaged in his meal he spoke but little. The German sat upon the shepherd's bed and watched him with curious looks. As soon as his hunger was satisfied—he ate as if he had not tasted food for the last week—he began to question his host respecting the topographical position of the place, and the distances to the different stations. Having obtained all the information

on this subject which he wanted, he inquired into the circumstances of the master of the station—the different people he employed—his domestic life. At the same time, he seemed to be not a little interested in the proceedings of the police of the bush. The police-stations extend as far as the Murray, although at considerable distances from each other, and the black police, which had been organized but a short time, had already shown the usefulness of the institution by many an extraordinary capture, and the discovery of many a murder and theft. The stranger inquired most particularly about the police, but was at last obliged to relinquish all hope of obtaining definite information on this subject. The hut-keeper was not the right source from which he could draw the intelligence he was in search of.

When he had finished his meal, he stretched himself before the hut, and in a comfortable posture awaited the return of the shepherd; nor did he stir from the place until the sound of the bells and the barking of the dog announced the arrival of the flock.

From this moment Miller's duties commenced. Without taking any further notice of his guest, he went to meet the flock and drive it into the yard. Here he remained during the night in a small gunyo of bark, and was answerable for the safety of the flock until morning. If any sheep were lost during the night through his negligence, the value was deducted from his wages, about 20*l.* a year. If the shepherd lost any during the day, he had to pay.

When the sheep had been counted, and the shepherd had seen them driven safely into the yard, he sauntered slowly towards the hut. He halted when he caught sight of the new arrival, of whose coming he had already gained intelligence from the hut-keeper. He scrutinized him most attentively; and even his dog seemed to assist him in the examination. He crept slowly up to the man, who was still in a recumbent position, advanced sniffing, and, with tail between his legs and hair erect on the back, uttered a low and plaintive howl.

"Hallo!" cried the stranger, jumping up quickly, and casting a savage look at the dog, "what is that cursed animal howling about?"

"Good evening, mate," said the shepherd, without giving a direct answer, and at the same time examining with an ex-

perienced glance the outward appearance of his guest, and the gun standing near him—"had a good sleep?"

"Good evening!" replied the guest, scanning the shepherd's countenance. "Ah, old fellow! I think we have seen each other before."

"Very possible, old cove," answered the shepherd, with a laugh, raising his sunburnt face, which bore a deep scar over the forehead. "We see a good deal of the country, look you; and, as I bear this precious mark upon my phiz, I am as easily recognised as the sign of a public."

"Rather inconvenient, isn't it?" the guest asked, trustfully.

"Sometimes it is, I confess," replied the shepherd; "but it has its advantages. This scratch has, perhaps, saved me from a few yards of rope."

"As a moral constraint?" said the guest, with a laugh; "but have you forgotten—Red John?"

"The devil!" exclaimed the shepherd, in a half-suppressed voice, glancing at the spot where he knew the hut-keeper to be. "What the devil brings you here? Has Jack given you leave of absence?"

"Yes, until he can catch me again," replied the other, to himself, in a suppressed tone. "But am I safe here? or is there work in prospect?"

"No chance of occupation; but you are safe, at least for a day or two. The governor has just been here, and he told me of the arrival of the waggons from Adelaide. The man with the rations will very likely be here to-morrow, but you can easily keep out of his way."

"What blockhead is that you have with you?" inquired the stranger, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder towards the German, then just returning to the hut. "None of the old sort?"

"Bless you, no," replied the shepherd; "but we have nothing to fear from him. He doesn't see further than his nose. But—the dog howled so suspiciously at you. The last time he did so was when he caught scent of a black who had murdered a white man by the Murray, and still bore the traces of the blood on his person. I hope you have not—?"

"Nonsense," replied the new-comer. "Who knows what the animal wants?"

"And that gun?"

"Is a present from a settler for saving his life?"

"For not shooting him through the window, I suppose?" said the shepherd, with a laugh.

"There are many ways of obliging people," answered the other, with a sort of a growl. "But don't bother me with these nonsensical questions. On what footing do you stand with the police?"

"Excellent, be d—d to them!" was the satisfactory answer. "For the last three years I haven't seen a policeman, and hope I shall not have the pleasure for as many more; *unless*," he added, slowly and thoughtfully, "they should come into this country on some *fresh* track."

"Yes; if a fellow is blockhead enough to leave tracks behind him," the guest remarked, with a grim smile. "But, I say, who was the stranger that accompanied your master to the station?"

"Don't know: although I fancied that I had seen his face before, yet I can't recollect where. It doesn't much matter," he added, laughing; "when people have such a large circle of acquaintances as you and I, we don't care about renewing the old ones."

"He does not belong to the police, I hope?"

"Bless you, no! He does not look like one; although it is difficult to tell, now-a-days, in what disguises the rascals may not appear. What the devil have you to do with the police? Are they in pursuit of you?"

"Me? They don't think of such a thing; you know that I always hated these official vultures. I should never feel at my ease if I knew that one of them was near. Besides, they have now hit upon a new system with these cursed black rascals. Upon my word, the life of an honest fellow is not safe with them! To set the blacks against the whites!" Parliament would not allow this, if legislators had but one spark of honour in their breasts!"

The shepherd laughed. Miller returned to prepare the evening meal, and the two old comrades turned their conversation from the police to indifferent topics, relating chiefly to the bush.

CHAPTER V.

THE DINGO HUNT.

We left the two horsemen galloping back into the bush. For some time the prickly grass, which has justly received its name from the porcupine, required all their attention. When they escaped from this, an extensive salt-bush plain opened before them; and as there was now not the least obstacle to impede the progress of their steeds, they went at a quicker pace.

The so called "salt-bush," the greatest boon to the rearer of sheep, is found in most different forms: sometimes tolerably high and elongated; sometimes with round or angular leaves; sometimes resembling marjoram, sometimes anise. They are always full of sap and nutritious, with a taste of salt, more or less decided; and are invariably a favourite food of the sheep, which can do without water for a considerable time when feeding on the so-called "pig's face."

From this point the country afforded the two horsemen a free and uninterrupted view of genuine Australian scenery. On their right and left, following the course of the river, stretched before their eyes the low, red sandy malley hills, scantily covered with thin grass. At rare intervals the slender, silvery trunks of the malley-firs arose from amid the malley-bushes with their regular branches. The background, formed partly by that broad belt of lofty, grey, and characteristically called "never-greens"—gum-trees, which covered the valley of the Murray, rising occasionally on its banks to an enormous height. The eye found no spot on which it could rest with pleasure. The landscape looked like a rainy sky, grey upon grey, with its monotonous vegetation and soil, only fit for the pasturage of sheep and cattle.

Meanwhile, the dogs ran before the horsemen, sniffing with eagerness in all directions, and the haste with which they crossed from one side to the other clearly showed that they were upon various trails. Mr. Powell encouraged them, and suddenly, scarcely twenty paces before them, two dark brown wild dogs, the so-called "dingoes,"* rushed from a thick salt-

* The "dingo" is an animal between the fox and the wolf. It is mostly of a yellowish colour, but sometimes a red-brown, of the size of a sheep-dog. It has a long bushy brush.

bush, and set off through the brushwood in different directions.

"Tally ho!" cried Mr. Powell, rising in his stirrups, with sportsman-like eagerness.

The shout resounded far over the plain, exciting the dogs, at first undecided in which direction to set off. This suspense, however, lasted only a few minutes, for some of the pack found the different trails, and immediately set off, half in one direction, and half in the other.

"Keep with your set, M'Donald," cried Mr. Powell, forgetting everything else in the eagerness of the chase; "the station lies yonder!"

Having said this, he put spurs to his horse, and followed the dogs.

M'Donald was too much of an Englishman to remain quiet at such a moment. Long acquainted with the bush, he entertained no fear of being lost; so he gave his horse the rein, and followed his game.

The dingo at first seemed inclined to make to the bush; but the fleet dogs were too close upon his heels, and cut off retreat in that direction. After doubling several times, like a hare, vainly endeavouring to put the hounds to fault, he set off straight across the country, in the direction of the station. Perhaps he intended to swim the river, or escape from his dangerous pursuers in the thick brushwood which covered its banks.

M'Donald rode an excellent animal. The dogs, now in full cry, had got a good start. Just as the hard-pressed dingo was doubling again, evidently making off towards the right, M'Donald took a short cut in that direction. He hoped by this manœuvre to fall in with the hounds, and, if possible, to overtake them, or, at least, get in sight again. This scheme was at first materially facilitated by a small open space, almost entirely free from bush, over which his horse bounded at a rapid rate. At the end a small malley hill impeded his progress, and with difficulty he made his way to the summit.

The moment that he succeeded in reaching the top, where the forest or bush became somewhat thinner, he listened for the sound of the dogs. All at once he heard human voices not far from the place at which he was standing. His first movement was to lay his hands upon the pistols, which had providently been put in the saddle, and he felt somewhat more

at ease when he grasped them. He took one: it was loaded. Not hearing the dogs anywhere, he turned his horse's head towards the direction in which the voices re-echoed, apparently in angry converse, and advanced over the sandy soil without making the slightest noise, until he came to a small thicket, the only separation between him and the speakers. He listened again, and thought he could distinguish the rough, angry tones of some native blacks.

M'Donald did not think it advisable to run into the hands of a troop of these men in the midst of the bush. At any rate, according to his calculation, he could not be far from the station, and the nearest belt of dark, lofty gum-trees must stand in the valley of the Murray. In spite of this, he did not know exactly how far he might be from the houses, and was in the act of turning aside into the sandy plain, in order to avoid meeting the blacks, when he suddenly heard the cry of a female voice, which froze the blood in his veins.

He stopped almost instinctively. The cry was repeated, and the next moment the bold horseman dashed into the midst of a troop of about eight or ten blacks, who started back with wild astonishment. Before him, stretching out her hands for help, stood Sarah, while two powerful blacks hastily snatched up their spears to resist his sudden attack.

"Oh, Mr. M'Donald," cried the young lady, in an agony of terror, "help me—take me home!"

"Do not fear, Miss Sarah," said the young man, in a cheerful and encouraging tone; "I will answer for your safety with my life. Did you come here on foot?"

"My horse has been taken from me, and is grazing yonder in the bush."

M'Donald perceived that he had arrived just in time to rescue the poor girl from her unpleasant position, and perhaps save her from violence. He boldly turned to one of the biggest and fiercest-looking of the troop, saying to him, in his own language, "I say, old fellow, catch that horse yonder, and bring it here. Quick! Do you understand?"

The black looked astounded and aghast, little expecting to be addressed by a white man in his own tongue; but he stirred not, and only grasped the spear which he held in his hand tighter.

"You, white man," he answered, "what do you want here? We have not called you. Go away, your place is not here."

M'Donald would gladly have jumped off his horse, placed Sarah upon it, and thus removed her out of danger as quickly as possible; but he knew well enough that by so doing, he should have deprived himself of a great advantage over the blacks, who could then have thrown their spears at him and Miss Powell, and have quickly made their escape into the bush. Their attitude betrayed but too clearly that they had support close at hand. Probably, a strong tribe or troop of them was encamped in the neighbourhood, for these did not belong to the tribe at the station. Without, therefore, wasting another word upon them, he drew out his pistol, cocked it, and pointed it at the breast of the black. The man at first made a movement, as if anxious to avoid the dangerous weapon, but still kept his ground.

"Now, hear me!" said the young stranger, quietly; "you know what I have in my hand. A pressure of my finger, and I send the short spear through your butter, and the 'murrang redlu' (wild dogs) shall gnaw thy bones. And this," continued he, partly drawing the second pistol, and letting it fall back into the holster, "is for the next rascal who offers to raise a spear. If, on my return, I do not find the horse, at the same place, we shall drive your whole tribe into the Murray, and make you food for the fishes. And now move, if you dare, black, cowardly rascals that you are, to attack a helpless woman!"

The blacks still paused, as if irresolute what to do, when M'Donald called out to the young lady not to lose a moment, to take hold of the stirrup-strap, and walk by his side. Sarah did as he directed, and M'Donald quietly turned his horse's head towards the nearest even space. Pistol in hand, he carefully watched the movements of his enemies, and at last saw them crowd together, brandishing their spears eagerly, and speaking hastily to each other. He had now gained about a hundred paces in advance; but he knew very well, that in an attack of the blacks, his companion would be exposed to the greatest danger.

"They are going to follow us," he hurriedly whispered to her; "but they have lost the favourable moment. Give me your hand, Miss Sarah; place your foot upon mine—here, you can easily get up on these roots. Quick! they per-

ceive our intention—quick, for God's sake, or it will be too late!"

Sarah was a genuine child of the forest, and perfectly at home in the saddle. Without the least hesitation she did as she was told—jumped upon the root, which they had now reached, placed her foot upon that of the horseman, and slung herself into the saddle. The blacks, emboldened by this attempted flight, rushed forward with a wild shout. The noble creature scarcely felt the spur ere it made the dust fly far behind, and bounded off with its burden with the rapidity of the wind. A few spears fell short of the fugitives, and M'Donald and his beautiful charge were soon beyond the reach of harm. Sarah pointed out the shortest way to the station, telling her preserver in hasty words how—perhaps a little thoughtlessly, but fearing no danger, as the black tribe was encamped close to the station—she had gone forth to meet *her father*, as she had often done before. Not venturing to ride further into the bush, she had stopped at a place whence she could command a view of the whole plain, when she was suddenly surrounded by the blacks, whose attitude became more threatening every minute, until he had rescued her from their grasp. M'Donald made no reply. He was about to beg of her never again to expose herself to such danger,—to express his gratefulness to Providence for guiding him to her aid at the right moment,—but he could not find words. Silently he supported the young girl, with his right arm round her waist, until all danger of being overtaken by the blacks was over and they could see the enclosures of the station. Then he stopped his horse, swung himself out of the saddle, which he gave up to the lady, put her left foot into the stirrup, and, leading the horse by the bridle, walked slowly at her side the rest of the way, until they arrived at the station.

"Hallo! M'Donald, where is your brush?" exclaimed Mr. Powell, who had arrived a short time before, triumphantly holding out the trophy taken from the dingo. "But," added he, "bless me! how did Sarah get upon your horse?"

"Father," said Sarah, "if Mr. M'Donald has missed his game it is not his fault, but mine. He met me at the right moment to save me, perhaps, from too severe a punishment for my thoughtlessness."

"I found Miss Sarah near the blacks," said M'Donald,

with an imploring glance at the young lady, as if he wished to avoid the mention of the adventure, "and I offered her my escort."

"Blacks?" exclaimed Mr. Powell; "then the black rascals are in the neighbourhood, after all!"

"In the *neighbourhood* of blacks," repeated Sarah, with surprise. "He saved me out of *their hands!*"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed her father, with fear and surprise; "did they dare——"

"Do not be uneasy on that account," said M'Donald, calmly. "A few impudent fellows, belonging to some wandering tribe, had, indeed, the audacity to stop Miss Powell; and when they thought we were far enough not to hurt us, they hurled their spears after us. But the horse shall be in your possession again this very evening, or, at the latest, by to-morrow morning. I will at once send one of the fellows encamped here to fetch it, and I feel perfectly certain he will regain it without difficulty."

Without waiting for an answer, he left Mr. Powell and his daughter, and hastily walked towards the spot where the blacks were encamped. Mr. Powell elicited from his daughter the details of her adventure, and he seemed inclined to assemble his men that very evening, and to chastise the blacks for their impertinence and audacity: it was so far advanced that this plan was abandoned, and he resolved to go out early on the following morning in order to reconnoitre. This was necessary, or at least prudent, to show the daring natives that a sufficient number of white men could be assembled to frustrate any designs they might have formed.

The news greatly alarmed Mrs. Powell, and she feared a collision with the revengeful blacks, which might endanger her family and the lives of her children. Deeply did she feel the obligations she owed to their guest, and she awaited his return with impatience, anxious to express her gratitude. In this, however, she was doomed to be disappointed, at least for that evening. They had waited supper for him more than a quarter of an hour, when a message was brought from him by the stock-keeper, to the effect that he could not come. They were, moreover, informed that he had gone into the bush with one of the blacks, not only for the purpose of recovering the horse, but also for that of examining the camp of the blacks, to ascertain their strength, and whether any real

danger was to be apprehended. Mr. Bale shook his head at this somewhat fool-hardy night expedition in company of one of that "worthless, treacherous set." At the same time, he declared that it was his opinion that M'Donald did not look as if he would be easily worsted, and no doubt he would return on the following morning perfectly well. He added, that it was his intention to let them know a bit of his mind, and teach them what it was to insult a white woman.

Mr. Powell was not altogether pleased at his guest's rash expedition. M'Donald was not even well acquainted with the forest, and would have to rely entirely upon his black guide; but he did not give expression to his thoughts, as the ladies seemed quite uneasy enough. He told Mr. Bale to arm the people, and hold them in readiness for the following morning, when the man with the ration-cart should go to the shepherd's hut, for the purpose of searching the nearest bush, and, if necessary, of clearing it.

The preparations commenced at break of day. Sarah was alone in the breakfast-parlour, laying the table and getting the simple meal ready, when the door suddenly opened, and M'Donald entered. He looked pale and grave, and only answered the kind words she addressed to him with a silent and almost sad smile. The maiden's heart—why, she knew not herself—grew heavy with forebodings of impending misfortune.

"Do you know that your rash crusade of last night made us very uneasy?" she said at last, as a friendly reproach.

"I am extremely sorry to hear that, for I had quite an opposite intention," said M'Donald. "I wished to reassure you, and at the same time to ascertain for myself the exact number of the tribe encamped about here. I can now give you the satisfactory news that you need entertain no fears for your safety. Your horse is also recovered."

"You met the blacks, then?" Sarah inquired, anxiously.

"I got close to their camp and counted their fires," replied M'Donald, smiling. "This could be done in perfect safety on so dark a night; for they are too superstitious to venture beyond their light."

"I was rather surprised yesterday at the thorough knowledge you showed of their language," said Sarah, blushing—"indeed, so surprised and frightened with the adventure, that

I have not yet thanked you for your assistance as I might have wished."

"Miss Sarah," replied M'Donald, with deep emotion, "the recollection of the small service I have been happy enough to render you will always be a ray of sunshine in my life, not over rich in joys. Let me take that with me into the cold, friendless world, and preserve me ever so small a place in your heart, from which may God avert pain and sorrow!"

"You desire to leave us again?" exclaimed Sarah, with painful surprise.

"Yes, this very morning," answered M'Donald, firmly. "I can stay no longer; I am even afraid," he added, in a low voice, "I have already stayed too long, and I *must* go away."

"And what compels you to depart thus?" asked Sarah, evidently striving to seem calm and collected. "My father likes you, and will do anything in his power to keep you in our neighbourhood. Then, is it right to come to one's friends to confer upon them obligations never to be forgotten, and to leave them suddenly, as if you were tired of their intercourse? What would you say, were I to entreat you to stay for a short time only?"

"You must not do so," replied M'Donald, hurriedly; "I might not, perhaps, be able to refuse such a request."

"Then I make it most earnestly," said Sarah, whilst a tell-tale blush suffused her cheeks and brow; "and both my father and mother will support it."

"What, my child," asked Mr. Powell, stepping in with his wife, "what is the matter?"

"Mr. M'Donald wishes to leave us already, and I said you would second my request for him to stay longer with us."

"With all my heart," exclaimed Mr. Powell. "My dear friend, you must on no condition think of leaving us so soon. Did you not wish to look out for a cattle-run in the neighbourhood?"

"It appears that you wish to run away in order to escape the expression of our gratitude for rescuing our dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Powell, affectionately taking M'Donald's hand. "Are you so indifferent at having preserved a whole family from a fearful misfortune?"

"I will stay," answered M'Donald, suddenly, but with a painful expression upon his countenance; "at least, I will

remain for some time to prove to you how gladly, how very gladly I avail myself of your hospitality."

"But I hope you are not making any sacrifice," exclaimed Mr. Powell, quickly; for it did not escape him that his guest was strangely moved. "You must not neglect your own affairs for our sakes; you must recollect that we poor inhabitants of the bush cling rather tenaciously to every one who becomes dear to us, and naturally enough wish to keep our friends near us. You may therefore expect that we shall at display the same unwillingness to part with you, weeks and months hence, that we have shown to-day."

"It is my most fervent wish you may never repent your kindness," said M'Donald, taking the hand offered to him and shaking it heartily.

"Now come in to breakfast, children," said Mrs. Powell; "where is 'Lisbeth, and Bill, and Ned, and John? Come in; the tea will be cold, and the whole breakfast spoiled."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT WITH THE BLACKS.

While the household were at breakfast, all was life and agitation at the station. Mr. Powell had ordered his two stock-keepers, who happened to be there, to accompany him on an excursion into the bush. He had, moreover, armed his bullock-drivers, and added to the party the two hut-keepers of the station itself, in order to make as respectable a troop as possible to take against the blacks; thus hoping at once to awe them sufficiently to deter them from any future attacks.

Mr. Powell knew very well that he had nothing to fear from the blacks near the house, while such a troop remained in the vicinity of the station; the men very seldom or never offer violence to the white; on the contrary, they do their utmost to show how friendly they are disposed towards them. Whether these feelings are sincere or feigned, is quite a different matter.

Mr. Bale was in the meantime mustering his small troop, examining their arms, and enlightening his men with the

narration of some of his fights in the bush, and giving particular cautions against straggling and getting in the rear.

"Hang the black rascals!" he exclaimed, with an oath; "whenever they can get at a man from behind, they do so, and the cursed wooden spears are certain death. If you face them, they cannot take so much time for their aim, and the *eye* of their antagonist awes them. The rascals are nothing but cowards after all, and run away like wild dogs when they do not fight in a large body, or cannot attack from behind."

As Mr. Powell only intended to take a morning ride in the bush, the preparations were soon completed. The men, who had already breakfasted, carried some provisions with them, in case they should stay in the bush after noon. They awaited rather impatiently the arrival of their master and the order for their march.

Mr. Powell came at last, accompanied by M'Donald and his sons. The latter—at least, George and Bill, the eldest—soon mounted their horses, so as not to cause any delay. Ned walked at his father's side unarmed, and sorely displeased, for he had been ordered by his father *not* to accompany the expedition, but to stay at home with him to protect the house and family. After all, it was not safe to place entire reliance upon their black neighbours.

"Have you told the men how I wish this affair to be conducted, Mr. Bale?" Mr. Powell asked the chief stock-keeper. "Above all things, take care not to fall into disorder."

"It is all right," replied the Yorkshireman; "we will give these black rascals such a lesson that, by heavens! they will not annoy a white lady again, and, above all, Miss Sarah!"

"I am afraid you misunderstood me, Mr. Bale," said Mr. Powell, very gravely; "I expressly forbid you to use violence against these unfortunate men; and you must have recourse to your arms only in the last extremity, and in self-defence."

"Self-defence?" said one of the stock-keepers, with astonishment.

"Certainly, only in self-defence," was the firm and decisive answer. "I will not, by over-severity or recklessness, cause blood to be spilled unnecessarily, and thereby arouse the anger of the blacks, and perhaps goad them to take vengeance upon some innocent people. Most murders committed a-

the stations arise from such causes. We do them plenty of harm by forcibly taking possession of their hunting-grounds, without scattering death in their ranks. The offence committed by a few of them yesterday certainly requires to be noticed. We must show them that we have the means and power to punish them, did we desire to do so. For this purpose I have arranged this excursion. They are easily frightened, and this will be a warning to them for the future. I hope you perfectly understand me, Mr. Bale?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered the stock-keeper, sulkily. "I would, however, have you remember, that by too great leniency you make them overbearing instead of frightening them."

"Do not fear that such will be the case. One word more. Let there be no firing, not even in the air, as men are so fond of doing whenever they get a gun into their hands. It makes the blacks daring, and they usually fancy you have fired at them and missed. There must be no firing but in a case of extremity, and then in such a manner that every shot shall, if possible, tell. You see I am not, as you seem to fancy, inclined to take only half-measures, but I will have no blood spilled unnecessarily. Do you think, M'Donald, we could induce one of these fellows lounging idly yonder before their fires to guide us?"

"Scarcely," replied the latter; "but we can try. It is, however, ten to one that the two troops are more closely allied than they seem inclined to admit; and if one of them should consent to go with us, it would be a question whether he could be trusted."

"Well, we can at least try," answered Mr. Powell. "You speak their language, and the man who accompanied you last night may perhaps be induced to act as guide to-day."

With M'Donald he walked towards the camp of the blacks, leaving Mr. Bale in by no means a friendly or conciliatory mood.

"The old story again," he muttered, "running after these black rascals just to wish them a good morning, and then to return."

"Wait until we get out, Mr. Bale," said George, who had returned with his horse and overheard Bale's remark. "Father is always too cautious in this respect; nevertheless,

we will give them a reminder. They shall not frighten Sarah for nothing."

"Yes, and then I shall catch it," murmured the stock-keeper; "it is rather dangerous joking on this subject with the governor."

"Nonsense, we must show them we are in earnest," replied the young man, burning with impatience to try his strength with the blacks. Like most of his countrymen, he considered them as little better than wild dogs, and would not have made much difference between shooting one of them and a dingo.

Meantime Mr. Powell and his companion had reached the camp of the blacks. They found it in complete tranquillity and comfortable indifference, in spite of the warlike preparations going on so near. They had just finished their breakfast, at which they had devoured the remains of the three sheep they had received the day before. The women crouched by the fires, and the men were stretched out upon their backs, in order to give the stomach full play for digestion. The dogs alone were still at work at the bones which their masters had thrown to them. They gnawed one, while they held two more under their paws, lest some other dog should seize the precious and scarce booty.

Only one native had taken up his station away from the camp. This was Nguyulloman, whose gunyo was situated on the summit of a small isolated sand-hill, distant about sixty paces. He kept up a good fire, and seemed to be the only one who had anything left of the provisions given the night before, which he was just preparing in a way peculiar to himself. Sometimes he covered the coals with a large piece of bark, to smother the fire; at another moment he admitted the air, and let the thick smoke rise until the flames broke out anew. At the same time he devoured his meal, without seeming to trouble himself much about the rest of the tribe.

"It seems," said Mr. Powell, pointing to the cripple, "as if he was wading in the sand up to his hips, and that is why he moves with so much difficulty. What a poor wretch! If his tribe were to forsake him, he must die of hunger."

"I am not sure of that," replied M'Donald, who had thoughtfully examined the strange form of the cripple. "I

am far from considering this cripple so inoffensive, and the boomerang which he wears tied round his neck shows that he is at least capable of handling this weapon. I feel satisfied he creeps up to a kangaroo more stealthily than any young fellow of his tribe, and his aim is sure enough. It is most remarkable to observe with what skill he throws bones or pieces of wood at those dogs which approach too near,—he never misses."

"Yes, indeed, and these lean brutes have the greatest possible respect for him," continued Mr. Powell, laughing. "But let us go to the 'burkas,' and see what is to be done with them."

M'Donald addressed the blacks, who had half risen from their recumbent posture on their arrival. He asked Kakurru to guide them. But another thick-headed, white-haired fellow, who had almost as many wrinkles on his face as punctured marks on his shoulders and back, answered for him; not in his own language, but in frightful English.

"Black tribes there," was about the meaning of his speech, —"bad fellows—take much butter and can cast charms—make rain and wind, and dry up the water-holes. White men have given them meat—good—a thousand good—but they are honest blacks—steal no horse and no sheep, and live at peace with their neighbours. If they accompany the white men, the black men will come in the night to suck up their butter, and make them blind, and spear women and children."

Kakurru, too, did not seem inclined to accept the offer; he laid down again, put his hands under his head, and closed his eyes.

"Well, if you don't like to go, stay here," said Mr. Powell, who prided himself on knowing the men with whom he had to deal; "but if one of you had gone with us as a guide, I should have given him another fat sheep as a reward."

Kakurru opened his eyes, but did not stir.

"A sheep?" said the old man with the white hair.

"Perhaps two, if I had reason to be satisfied with him," replied Mr. Powell with a smile, as if confident of victory.

The elders conversed together for a good while, in such low whispers that even M'Donald could not understand what they said. Contrary to their expectations, the result of the conference was a negative. Kakurru did not stir, and the

remainder declared they would have nothing to do with this business.

"Two sheep are good," said the white-haired fellow, "but black tribe is very bad; do not like to irritate them."

Mr. Powell did not seem altogether disinclined to make a higher offer, but M'Donald prevented him, saying: "For God's sake, leave the blacks to follow their own inclinations. The most you could do would be to induce them to accept of your offer, and to lead us somewhere into the bush; but certainly not to the place where the other tribe is encamped. They do not like to have anything to do with the transaction, and I can easily understand their motives. Let us search the country, and if we find no blacks in the neighbourhood, so much the better. If we do meet with them, we shall show them that we are their masters, and thus accomplish our purpose."

"Very well, I am quite willing. Just look at the cripple; I think he has fallen asleep."

Nguyulloman had apparently fallen asleep. He lay motionless by his fire. Some of the dogs which had already devoured their share dispersed, and crept, slowly and carefully, towards the hill. When one got hold of a bit of meat or a bone, he snatched it up, and, with his tail between his legs, ran away in all haste to devour his choice morsel in safety at some distance. This encouraged the others, and two of the boldest had ventured to within about fifteen paces of the cripple, in order to take possession of a sheep's head, which was already pretty well cleared of the flesh, when Nguyulloman raised his dark and crooked form with the quickness of lightning, and threw at the frightened animals two sharp bones which he held in readiness, with such force and unerring aim, that the poor brutes yelled aloud with pain and scampered away as fast as possible. After this, the dogs kept at a distance.

The skill with which the apparently helpless cripple had thrown the bones was really astonishing. He, however, did not seem to consider it extraordinary; but continued as before, busily engaged with his fire, only casting an occasional glance at the white man now advancing towards him.

If Mr. Powell had intended to enter into conversation with him, he was prevented by a discovery which he made on reaching the top of the hill. From the gum-bush, at the

distance of about two miles, a thin smoke rose high into the air, and his shout, "There is the camp of the blacks!" called M'Donald's attention to the spot.

"If such be the case," said M'Donald, "they have only removed there this morning. Last night they were encamped in that direction, and I am sure that they did not alter their position in the dark."

"Perhaps they are going away," Mr. Powell suggested. "In that case it is so much the more necessary to prove to them before they do so, that we are well prepared for them, or else we shall have them back in a few days more daring still. Be so kind, therefore, Mr. M'Donald to take the men with Mr. Bale, in that direction, and once more let me entreat you not to allow blood to be shed, if not absolutely necessary." Before descending the hill, Mr. Powell turned to the Nguyulloman and said to him: "That smoke comes from the tribes which were encamped yonder last night, doesn't it!"

"Don't know," the latter answered, sulkily. "When black man sleeps at night, he makes a fire; when he goes away in the morning, he lets it burn."

This was all that could be got out of him. Meantime the small troop, headed by Mr. Powell's two sons, anxiously awaited his return. As soon as he came with M'Donald they all vaulted into their saddles.

"And now let us be off!" cried Mr. Bale, "or else we shall give the black beasts too great a start, and in the end they'll believe that we are afraid of them!"

"They are in that direction, and not far off, Mr. Bale," said Mr. Powell. "From the hill we perceived their camp fires."

"In that direction?" said the overseer, with surprise. "I thought they were in quite an opposite quarter."

"At any rate, smoke is to be seen yonder" observed M'Donald.

"Well, so much the better," replied the stock-keeper to himself, with a laugh, "there is nothing but the salt-bush between them and us, and we shall be able to go all the way at full speed. Any further orders, Mr. Powell?"

"None; remember what I told you before."

"Forward, then!" he called out. Turning his horse's head, he took a flying leap over the barrier, which was about four feet and a half high. Mr. Powell's two sons followed him at

once, and so did M'Donald, who again rode his grey horse. The shepherds and hut-keepers, mounted for the occasion, went more carefully to work. They first got one of the men who remained behind at the station to take out the bars, in spite of the jeers and laughing of the cattle-drivers, all practised horsemen; and they then followed the rest of the party, who had already got a considerable start.

Mr. Bale, riding at the head of the troop, discovered the smoke, and was about to urge his men to a brisker pace, in order to come up with the blacks as soon as possible, and to track them in case they had left their camp, when M'Donald perceived some one standing in the bush on their right, on somewhat higher and more open ground, making signals to them. At his command the party halted, and by the aid of a small pocket telescope which he carried with him, he made out a white man standing on the top of a malley-hill, who, probably for want of a handkerchief, was waving his jacket round his head.

"That is the hut-keeper, Miller," said Mr. Bale, after a glance through the glass; "something must have happened, or else this lazy fellow would not have come here from the station at such an early hour. At any rate, we must go to him and see."

Without waiting for an answer, M'Donald rode towards the spot in which he had seen the man, who, as soon as he perceived the horsemen coming towards him, ran and met them half way.

It was, as Mr. Bale had said, Miller, the German hut-keeper. Pale, exhausted with his hasty run, he had scarcely sufficient breath left to relate what had brought him from the station.

"The blacks!" he gasped forth, as soon as he came within hearing of the horsemen—"the blacks—have—attacked the station—driven away the sheep—all, all, away."

"The devil!" exclaimed Mr. Bale. "The whole herd?"

"Scattered and carried off," was the answer.

"This morning?" asked George, approaching hastily.

"Yes—that is—before daybreak."

"Then this idle rascal has been sleeping again!" exclaimed Bale, darting an angry look at the poor fellow.

Miller attempted to defend himself, but the overseer gave him no time for it.

"Brown and Bartlett," said he, "ride as quickly as you can to the spot where we saw the smoke. We must ascertain whether they are really there, or whether it is only a stratagem, in order to lead us on a false track. If, as I suppose, you find nothing, you will cross the dry creek which runs in that direction, and come to the salt-ponds. You know the place. This is the easiest plan; and if the black thieves have driven the sheep in that direction, we shall meet there. At any rate, I shall leave some one to wait for you. If you arrive first, wait. But if they should have gone this way, which is not probable, one of you come and let me know while the other follows the track. The rest of us will ride to the station: they cannot move very rapidly, with the sheep, and we must overtake them."

The orders were executed instantly. The two stock-men turned off to the left, and, in a few minutes, Miller was alone in the bush. He returned much more slowly than he had come, and seemed to be considerably cut up for the loss of the sheep. As they had been driven away during the night, when under his care, he would be answerable for the loss, if they were not recovered.

After an hour's ride, the small troop reached the station, where Henricks was just returning, bathed in perspiration, with a gun upon his shoulder. He had followed the tracks which led northward into the thickest part of the bush, and he requested the horsemen, whom he had certainly not expected so soon, at once to go in pursuit. The tracks were distinct, so that they could not miss them; and, mounted as they were, they must soon overtake the blacks.

"At what o'clock were they driven away?" inquired Bale, anxious to obtain some idea of the distance they might have gone since that time.

"How do I know?" replied Hendricks. "That lazy hut-keeper and his wretched cur were both fast asleep; and when I rose this morning, at daybreak, and found the yard empty, I had to wake them both."

"Did they take the whole herd off?"

"No; they know better than that," replied the shepherd. "I have already recovered some seventy or eighty, and there are a good many running about the bush. The dingoes have been amongst them. I think they have driven off some eighty or a hundred; such a number are more easily taken

care of. At first the lot was larger, as I could see by the tracks; but they have left behind those that were somewhat slow, and only taken the fleetest."

"Who is that in the hut?" said the overseer, suddenly, with an inquiring glance at the shepherd.

"In the hut?" replied the latter, confused.

"Yes; I saw this sheet of bark moving. Is any one there?"

"Hem!—yes; a poor devil of a bundleman, who arrived last night. He is looking out for work. He sprained his foot, and can't get on; in fact, he was altogether out of sorts. He is lying on my bed."

Bale dismounted, gave his horse to one of the men to hold, and entered the hut. He had, of course, nothing to say against the hospitality offered to the stranger, but he wished to see who he was.

When he got into the hut, he looked at once towards the spot where he had seen the sheet of bark moving; but that part was empty. The stranger was reclining on the bed, placed against the opposite side of the wall, with his back turned to the door.

"Hallo, my friend! where do you come from?"

"Hallo, sir!" replied he, turning round. "I am confoundedly out of sorts, and was glad to reach this place last night."

"Where do you come from?"

"North-West Bend."

"Are you a shepherd?"

"I understand the business."

"Can you shear?"

"I think so."

"Well, perhaps there is a place here for you," said Bale. The wild appearance of the man did not strike him as anything extraordinary. Most people of the sort who wander through the bush look more like escaped highwaymen than honest labouring men. "Stay here until we return, and I'll talk to Mr. Powell about it. I have no doubt the German who is hut-keeper here must be sent away, for this is the third time he has neglected his duty. I must be off now." And he went out and mounted. "Mr. M'Donald, if you have no objection, we'll go at once after the black rascals, and I am sure that Mr. Powell can have nothing to say against it.

if we give them a sharp lesson. If we let this pass unpunished, they will burn our houses over our heads next. Point out the track, Hendricks, and try to collect as many of the sheep out of the bush as you can."

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the shepherd, moving on quickly. He had not to go far; close to the hurdles the broad and distinct track by which the sheep had been driven by the blacks was visible; further in the bush, the marks were deeply impressed in the soft sand, and could not well be mistaken.

As soon as the horsemen had reached the tracks, the stockman put spurs to his steed, and galloped forward at full speed. When they came to the so-called "salt-pond," a remarkable spot in the bush, they halted, to wait for the men sent in the direction in which they had first seen the smoke.

The "salt-pond" was situated in a flat, arid plain, surrounded on all sides by red sandy malley hills. It was calculated to make a strong impression upon any European seeing it for the first time. A spot of about two hundred feet in diameter looked, in spite of the heat, which was already becoming oppressive, exactly as if it was covered with strong and firm ice. Solid salt, of the thickness of at least an inch and a half, was spread out on the surface of the ground, broken only at one place, where Mr. Powell procured the salt he required for his station. For several hundred paces the ground was entirely bare and arid. Not a blade of grass grew there. Even the malley-bush had not taken root, and was only to be seen again where the hills rose out of this salt hollow.

The blacks had passed this way with the sheep, and the young Powells glowed with impatience to pursue the thieves. Bale, however, tried to restrain their ardour; for, to judge by the tracks in the sand, the blacks were more numerous than was at first supposed. Perhaps a junction had been effected between two of their tribes, and it was not advisable to encounter them with weakened forces.

Their patience was not, however, sorely taxed. A quarter of an hour had scarcely elapsed ere the two horsemen, so impatiently expected, arrived, and announced that the smoke arose from a small fire *without* gunyees, and that they could only distinguish the tracks of one solitary black, which they did not feel inclined to follow in the labyrinth of brushwood. The smoke they supposed to be nothing but a signal to other blacks scattered about in the bush.

Nothing now prevented the immediate pursuit of the thieves, and the troop galloped forward, as quickly as the nature of the ground would permit, preceded by the stock-keeper and M'Donald; the one keeping the tracks on the right, the other those on the left.

Fortunately for them, the blacks had, on account of the sheep, been forced to keep to the open ground, in order to get away faster. The pursuers entertained little doubt of very soon overtaking the depredators, as the sheep must naturally retard their progress, when they suddenly came upon six sheep lying dead in the bush, with their bellies ripped open.

"This is some of their work!" cried the overseer, stopping by the slaughtered animals, and dismounting. "But what can be the meaning of this? Surely, the rascals do not know that we are upon their tracks."

"At their old tricks, no doubt," said one of the other stock-keepers, with an oath. "Just see whether they have left the kidneys."

"No, they are gone!" exclaimed Mr. Bale. "What pampered gluttons! I suppose we shall find the whole flock in this state."

"The longer we delay, the more sheep will be slaughtered," said M'Donald.

"True, we have not a moment to lose. Forward!" cried Bale, and remounting, he put spurs to his horse, and rushed to the head of the troop. They no longer had any trouble in making out the tracks; these were plainly indicated by the slaughtered sheep. They found them one or two at a time, from all of which, nothing but the kidney had been taken. The blacks had, however, lost time in these delays; and when the troop arrived at the top of the hill, they could see the whole tribe quietly resting on the borders of a thick and disagreeable-looking malley-bush. The natives knew very well that the horsemen could not follow them into this, and did not fear them so much when dismounted. Some of them were busily engaged slaughtering some of the sheep, probably only with the view of taking from them the delicate kidneys, whilst others were driving the remainder of the flock, consisting perhaps of twelve or fourteen, into the bush, in which they immediately disappeared.

Further orders were not wanted. Every man saw his goal before him, and, looking out for the most favourable spot,

the horsemen dashed at full speed down the hill, towards the blacks, still busily engaged in their occupation. The latter had, no doubt, perceived their pursuers before,—had even, perhaps, been apprized of their arrival by spies concealed in strange hiding-places. In spite of this, they continued their work until the horsemen were about two hundred paces from them, when they also dived into the thicket, with their light booty and blood-stained hands.

A few moments after, the foaming horses stood at the borders of the malley-bushes, which stretched their straight arms towards them, covered with green foliage, as if to keep them away. Bale was perfectly well acquainted with the ground, and at once divided his men into two divisions. One of these he committed to the direction of the second stock-keeper, whose cattle-run was in this neighbourhood, desiring him to surround the wood on the right, and to cut off the retreat of the blacks in the direction of the open plain behind; whilst, accompanied by M'Donald and the two young Powells, he struck off to the left for the same purpose.

Bale judged wisely. The route he had chosen being the shorter of the two, he reached the small salt-bush plain just in time to overtake the principal troop of the blacks, at that moment emerging from the thickets. Had they succeeded in crossing this plain, they would have been perfectly safe.

"We have caught them!" shouted the hardy bushman, exultingly rising in his stirrups and brandishing his gun above his head—"we have the whole gang." Having said this, he gave his horse the spurs, clearing the nearest bushes at one bound, and, troubling his head but little whether the rest were following him or not, dashed in amongst the blacks dismayed by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the enemy.

They, however, soon formed their plan. Whilst the women and children kept running in the first direction, the men, brandishing their spears, boldly advanced to receive their enemies, who were, indeed, inferior in point of numbers, but far superior in arms.

It was natural that the white men should let the women and children continue their flight without hindrance, and that they should accept the proffered combat. Bale knew the ground. Calling upon the rest to follow him, his only aim seemed to be to cut off the retreat of the women and

children from the woods. M'Donald and the two young Powells, on the contrary, caring little for the women and children, and scarcely heeding Bale's command, rode boldly at the blacks, who had now suddenly halted. Bale understood the stratagem. A small ravine rendered it impossible for the horses to get near the main body of the blacks, who, as soon as these saw that the enemy had fallen into the snare into which they wished to allure them, and whence they would have to make a great detour to reach them, disappeared with the quickness of lightning behind the low bushes, and fled towards the protecting thickets. Bale alone outstripped them. Dashing through the midst of the terrified women, who scattered with loud cries, he succeeded in reaching the open space at the bottom of the sand-hill, before the blacks. The latter, pressed on the other side by a greater danger, would not, of course, give way before a single white man. They kept among a number of low, but thick and entangled salt-bushes, before which the overseer had stopped, whilst two of them, slowly and silently crept nearer, and, from a secure hiding-place, threw their short wooden spears at the rider and his horse. At the same moment the overseer, goaded by blind fury, discharged his gun, loaded with large shot, into the midst of the blacks, who answered the report with a howl of pain. His horse, frightened at the noise of the discharge, reared, and, just as it showed its breast above the bushes, three spears struck it almost at the same instant, inflicting mortal wounds.

The blacks uttered a shout of triumph, and rushed at the horse, which was rearing and plunging, mad with pain, and Bale had the greatest difficulty in maintaining his seat. M'Donald, who had leaped the narrower part of the ravine, was now coming to his rescue, and at the noise of his approach the assailants withdrew. At that moment, the other party of the stock-men appeared upon the other side. George and William, who had galloped round the ravine, were now making up for lost time, and advanced at full speed.

George was the first to arrive. Leaping to the ground, he fired his gun, loaded with ball, at random, in the direction in which the last blacks were retreating into the bush.

Just as the report was heard, one of the natives sprang high into the air, gave two or three bounds forwards, clutched at one of the bushes, and then fell backwards upon the sand.

"Hurrah!" shouted William; "that was a good shot. Let us advance!" With these words, he made his horse bound over the ground to the spot where the man had fallen: M'Donald kept close at his side.

A few of the blacks had separated from the rest, probably anxious to remove the wounded man into the bush; but the horsemen were too close upon their heels to admit of this. Hurling their spears, which fell too short, or, from being hastily thrown, flew past them, they again disappeared in the thicket.

One dark form, reckless of the approach of the white men, rushed out from the shelter and bent over the dead body, uttering loud lamentations. At this moment William's horse missed its footing and fell, throwing its rider over its head. M'Donald turned round, and leaped out of the saddle; but young Powell, full of activity, and accustomed to such accidents, was soon upon his feet.

"Down with the black dogs!" he exclaimed, putting his gun to his shoulder. He fired at the form which was bent over the corpse. M'Donald stood near enough to prevent the *murder*, and, knocking the barrel of the gun aside with his hand, exclaimed, indignantly—

"Fie! shame on you, young man, to fire at a woman!"

"A woman!" cried William, with amazement; "but what matters—the whole race must be exterminated, or else we shall never be at peace."

As he uttered these words, he encountered the steady and almost threatening glance of M'Donald, and he turned away, half in shame and half in anger, to catch his horse, which had got up again. The female, however—a young girl—who had cast herself in wild despair upon the corpse of one of her kindred, seemed to feel herself safe, or perhaps was indifferent to danger in the deep sorrow occasioned by her loss. In mute and bitter woe she buried her face upon the breast of the murdered man, all her limbs trembling with anguish and excitement.

George had also hastened to the spot, in order to examine his victim. As he approached the sad group, a very different feeling to that of triumph crept over his heart; and, in a low whisper, he asked, pointing to the corpse, "Is he dead?"

"Your aim was sure," replied M'Donald, coldly; "he will steal no more sheep."

"But there are two. Did I kill *two?*" asked George, with consternation.

"I think so, although not with the same bullet. This unfortunate being is a young girl, who bewails the death of her father or brother. But let us return and support the rest, or try, at least, to get the sheep back. Where is Mr. Bale?"

"Here he comes," replied George, in a broken voice, without raising his eyes from the afflicted woman. At that moment two more shots were heard in the bush.

"More blood!" exclaimed M'Donald, with a deep sigh. "More and more, until the breach between the black and the white men gets wider and wider. Can we wonder at their seeking a deadly revenge?"

The other division almost surrounded the first thicket, in which some of the natives with the sheep were still hidden. They could not penetrate into it with their horses, and as they rode round it, the natives threw their spears at them, one of which slightly wounded the second stock-keeper on the thigh. This effected the object they had in view, which was to gather the enraged white men on one spot; and suddenly the greater number of the blacks darted out of the upper extremity of the thicket, which was scarcely a hundred paces from the principal bush, driving the terrified sheep before them with loud cries. Some of the animals escaped right and left; but the blacks succeeded in making off with the greater number of them. The enraged shepherds and stock-keepers dashed towards the spot in which they had disappeared. All they could do was to fire their guns at the fugitives.

One of their party had got separated from the rest, or let the right moment for making his escape slip. The second stock-keeper cut off his retreat, and tried to knock him down; and failing in this, he leaped off his horse. Before he could take aim, the black raised his spear, hurled it, and struck his foe on the breast. Fortunately for the latter, it hit the buckle of a small leathern bag which he carried slung over his shoulder, and rebounded. As the black pursued his flight, the stock-keeper lodged the whole charge of large swan-shot in his back, at the distance of about twenty paces. The poor fellow ran four or five paces further, and then, with outstretched arms, he fell down, burying his face in the sand.

CHAPTER VII.

RETURN OF THE EXPEDITION.

THE fight, with its excitement and fury, was over. The blacks had taken refuge in the bush, where the white men might, perhaps, have followed, certainly with but little chance of finding them; so that further pursuit was given up as entirely useless. The men were busy looking after the scattered sheep and driving them together—by no means an easy task, for the animals had become dreadfully shy and terrified. At last, those accustomed to this sort of work succeeded in collecting them together, and a shepherd and a hut-keeper were told to drive them back to the station.

The rest of the party were to pick up, on their way home, the slaughtered animals, and take as many of them as possible upon their horses.

"What is to be done with the corpse?" said George, who seemed to have forgotten everything else, to M'Donald: indeed, he had only just ventured to approach the place where it lay.

"I suppose we must leave it with the girl," replied the latter; "otherwise, I should like to have buried it."

"Buried!" exclaimed Bale, just returning with his saddle on his back, and in no friendly mood, on account of the loss of his horse. "Why should we plague ourselves about such black carrion! Let them go to the devil, the black rascals! The dingoes, their good friends and comrades, will know what to do with them."

"No, no," replied George, quickly; "the bodies—at least, not this one," he added, in a low voice—"must not be left to the beasts of prey. The thought would haunt me all my life. The poor wretches have paid dearly enough, and they are *men* after all."

"Men? I'll be hanged if I think so!" exclaimed the overseer. "However, you do as you like, I shall certainly not move a finger. If I could exterminate them all at one blow, I would do so, even at the risk of contaminating the air for a few months, and should consider I had done a good deed. The devil!" he suddenly exclaimed, throwing his saddle upon the ground, and raising his gun, "one of the brutes is still alive!"

"Stop!" cried M'Donald, stepping before him, "that is a woman weeping over the corpse."

"We'll save her the trouble," replied the man, with a fiendish laugh, maddened by the loss of his good horse.

"This woman is under my protection!" said M'Donald, firmly, confronting the heartless man. "There has been enough blood shed to-day, and Mr. Powell does not wish that *murder* should be committed by those in his service."

Bale, flushed with anger he could but with difficulty suppress, almost unconsciously directed his gun against the man who was resisting his authority. But the recollection of the events of the last hour soon brought him to himself again. It was M'Donald who, by his sudden arrival, had probably saved his life; and this he had not forgotten. In spite of his apparent roughness, Bale was not only an honest and upright, but also the kindest-hearted man imaginable, who never would have contemplated doing anybody the least wrong. He hated nothing but the blacks, and these he hated as he did the wild beasts: he nursed and cherished his wrath against these unfortunate tribes, as if they had done him and his the greatest injuries, instead of being first persecuted, provoked, and maltreated, and often driven to extremities by his race.

Such instances are met with in all parts of the world where savages are still struggling for their very existence with the settlers. They occur in the Australian colonies, as well as in North America. In all these countries, the poor native has no worse enemy than his nearest neighbour. The wrong inflicted upon them by the settlers' forefathers; the wrong inflicted upon them every day, by driving them further from the graves of their ancestors and their hunting-grounds, depriving them of all means of subsistence, is never taken into consideration. The least retaliation he practises on the invader is accounted a crime, and calls forth punishment and revenge against the whole tribe.

In America, as in most "discovered" countries, the lands belonging to the natives were purchased by the semblance of a bargain, and possession of them was obtained in return for small presents, or certain insignificant sums of money. In Australia, however, this process has not even been considered necessary. With few exceptions, where such a ceremony took place, the whole country has simply been taken possession of by

the present owners. The first settlers established themselves upon the coast, wherever they found good land and water, without caring much as to what tribe the ground belonged: the white man wanted it, what further ceremonies were needed! As the herds increased, the settlers—and they do this even now—sought new pasture-grounds, which have long been known under the name of "wild crown lands." When they found what they were looking for, they removed to the new settlement, paid the government a small rent required to protect them in their "property," shot some of the kangaroos and emus, and drove away the rest; and unmercifully punished the native, by means of powder and shot, because he gave way to the absurd thought that he had as much right to the sheep running about on *his* grounds, as the white man had to the kangaroos and wallobies.

But upon this question national economy—that is, the purse—pleads, in excuse of violence, civilization, and the advancement of the Christian religion. But, for all this, the heathens lose, and the Christians *gain*.

Such scruples were unknown to Bale. He was a capital specimen of the race of Australian stock-keepers and cattle-breeders. He cared as little for civilization as he did for Christianity, and as little for Christianity as national economy. The simple fact was this: the dingoes and blacks were dangerous to the sheep, and annoyed the settlers; and both dingoes and blacks must be exterminated. He was well aware that Mr. Powell opposed these principles; but that was natural; he knew no better, and was not obliged to be struggling and worrying out in the bush with the "black rascals." What he read in his books did not signify much.

On this occasion he was extremely vexed at not having been able to punish the "rascals" who had killed his horse; nor did he seem to think it an extraordinary proceeding to endeavour to make some other member of the tribe atone for it, even though that somebody might be a woman. The decided manner of the stranger towards him did not please him. After all, where did he come from, and who was he? At any other time this would have aroused his unbending spirit of resistance; but he would not treat as an enemy the preserver of Miss Sarah, to whom he was devoted with all his heart; at least, he could not do so, on account of an insignificant

black, and he made a violent effort to stifle the anger rising in his breast. For a moment he met the cold, dark gaze of the stranger fiercely enough; then, leaning on his gun, he said—

"Well, let her go, if you think fit. I have to thank you for saving my life. Were I to have my way, I know what I should do."

"Who will help me to bury the body?" asked M'Donald.

"I will," said George, in a low but firm tone. "Come, Mr. M'Donald, let us put the poor devil under the sand."

"Well, that is hardly worth the trouble," the overseer observed, laughing, as he carried his saddle to put it upon William's horse; "but men like to have their way."

The two white men approached the corpse, and M'Donald gently touched the girl upon the shoulder.

"Come, child," said he, in a friendly tone, "get up and follow your people; you have nothing to fear. We will bury the body to keep off the dingoes and birds of prey."

The girl arose slowly, and looked with wild, fearful eyes from one to the other. The fluency with which the stranger spoke her language also terrified her. At the same time she recognised the man who had twice stepped between her and the white foes. He could not mean evil towards her. With her hands stretched towards him, and in a confident manner, she entreated him—

"Oh, leave him to me; do not take him away. His grey head is red with blood, and his limbs are stiff. Let Pelyurko show him the honour which belongs to his age and rank."

"What does she say?" asked George, in a hoarse voice, almost choked with emotion. "Does she accuse me of murder?"

"No," replied M'Donald; "she desires nothing but to be left alone with the corpse. I think it will be best to do as she wishes."

"Come, sir, come," said George, in feverish haste, "let us leave the poor woman alone; I—I cannot stand it."

"Well," asked Bale, laughing, when he saw the two men returning without having accomplished their purpose, "is the burial already over? You can't have had a very long funeral oration."

To this speech George returned no answer, but took the

reins, jumped into the saddle, and dashed homeward, straight through the bush, as fast as his horse could carry him. Bale was watching him, when M'Donald turned round and said, in a friendly manner—

"It seems to me that you are lame. I suppose you got hurt in your fall. If you have no objection, take my horse; I am a good walker, and can easily get over these few miles."

"Thank you, sir; thank you, very heartily," replied Bale, fully appreciating the kind offer. "You are too good, and I will not inconvenience you. I have already asked Master William to make one of these lazy shepherds get off his horse. I think he is coming already. After all, the shepherds don't know how to sit a horse, and can get over the ground a great deal better on foot."

The whole party, now united, went round the thicket, collected as many dead sheep as the horses could carry, and set forward slowly towards the Murray.

Meantime, Pelyurko sat still and motionless by the side of the dead body of her father. Without complaint, without tears, with fixed glance, she followed the white murderers as long as she could see them; and, when they had disappeared in the bush, bent her eyes on vacancy.

Other eyes besides those of the mourning child watched the departure of the white men. Out of the bush, and the patches of the sharp prickly grass glided dark forms, glossy with the fat with which they had covered themselves, and bent down to raise the dead body. Pelyurko did not disturb them in the performance of their duty. They were the young men of her tribe; and, with slow steps, and her head hanging down, she followed the bearers. Further on, their comrades were to be seen, carrying the other dead body into the bush; and, for a full hour, an uninterrupted stillness reigned in the wilderness, in which so recently the dread sounds of strife re-echoed.

Suddenly, out of the bush, a loud wail, long and solitary, arose, penetrating to the inmost heart. When it had died away, the desert seemed to be as silent and desolate as before, when again a wild chorus of women's voices was heard, lamenting for the dead, in broken, trembling tones, which, sometimes rising, sometimes falling, filled the vast wood with loud cries of woe.

The wind ceased to whistle through the branches; the leaves no longer rustled; the talkative birds in the bush were silent; a dingo which, attracted by the smell of blood, had followed the tribe, started and sought the protection of the bushes, and nothing was heard over the desolate waste but the trembling wail—the death-lamentation for the slain and ill-treated children of the soil.

Meantime the stock-keepers drove the sheep homeward. The greater portion of the flock had been recovered from the blacks and the gang punished for their misdeeds. George rode silently at M'Donald's side, while Bale, upon an obstinate horse belonging to one of the stock-keepers, had more reason to regret the loss of his own. He grumbled and cursed the whole time, punishing the poor brute with whip and spur, and was altogether in a desperate humour.

The men had to work hard until late in the evening, collecting the sheep scattered in the bush, in order to prevent their being driven still further away by the dingoes. The carcasses of the animals slaughtered by the blacks were then sent to the head station in the carts.

The shepherd Hendricks had been kept so busily employed the whole day, that he had not had a single moment to play upon his jew's-harp—a thing which had not occurred to him for years. He succeeded, however, in getting the greater portion of his flock together; and when the stock-keepers brought back the animals they had recovered, only about sixty were missing.

The horsemen stopped at the outer station, and Bale alighted to examine the hurdles, as well as to vent his rage upon the careless hut-keeper, which, he recollected, he had scarcely had time to do in the morning.

Miller, however, expecting something of the sort, had left the hut to take care of itself, under pretence of looking after the scattered sheep. Afraid, however, of losing his way in the bush, he had concealed himself in a small thicket at a very short distance from the hut, waiting until the overseer and his men should have taken their departure.

When Bale entered the hut, hoping to find the lazy hut-keeper asleep as usual, which would have afforded him an additional excuse for beginning to storm at him, the stranger

was in his place, reclining cozily upon the sheep-skins, and, for want of tobacco, smoking dry leaves out of a short, black, clay pipe. He had heard the horses coming, but did not think it necessary to leave the hut on that account.

"Well, old fellow, you have taken possession of your new berth," said the stock-keeper, casting a hasty glance round the place, and thus ascertaining that the man he was looking for was not there. "Has Hendricks spoken to you about it?"

"He mentioned something of the sort," replied the man, puffing a thick cloud of the wretched and offensive smoke from him. "Want to dismiss the other, I suppose?"

"Of course; the fellow is too lazy and idle to take care of himself, much less of other people's sheep. It is no use giving a fellow 20*l.* to have him sleeping in the hut during the day, and by the hurdles at night."

"Twenty pounds is what you give?"

"Yes, when we are satisfied; *green* hands only get eighteen. I don't think *you* are one of that description."

"I don't think I am a *green* one!" was the reply, accompanied by a peculiar twitch of the mouth.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Adelaide."

"You know the duties of the place?"

"Think so."

"Can you shear?"

"Shear, break horses; and am, moreover, a sort of a sheep doctor."

"That's first-rate," said Bale. "Most of the fellows who wander about the bush, and offer themselves as shepherds and hut-keepers, scarcely know more of a sheep than that it has wool, and can be eaten. Were you ever engaged anywhere near the Murray?"

"Yes; in Miranda, on the other side."

"Well, you can remain here, and to-morrow morning I will send you word from the governor to confirm the engagement. Do you want anything else?"

"I should think so," answered the man, looking at him as if astonished at the question. "Do you suppose that one is in the habit of wandering about the bush with pockets full of tobacco? This is the last pipe, and the article seems to be

precious scarce here, too. Hendricks has already chewed my pocket because he has none left."

Bale laughed. "Very well; I will send you a pound of tobacco as earnest; and, as soon as Miller returns, tell him to come to the station."

"This evening?"

"To-morrow morning, if he likes. I shall speak to Hendricks on the subject. Something must be done to the hurdles. Get up, if you please, and I will show you what is required."

"My foot, sir, is not all right yet," answered the man, rising slowly, in compliance with the stock-keeper's request.

"I see; you have sprained your ankle. Well, is it all right?"

"Rather better to-day; only I must take care."

The man had risen, and was trying the lame foot upon the floor. Meantime the overseer's sharp eye had perceived something between the sheep-skins which attracted his attention. Under the skins, part of a gun had become visible; and, without much ceremony, he approached, kicked the skins aside, and took hold of the fire-arm.

"Hem!—a fine gun. Does it belong to *you?*" asked the overseer, pronouncing the *you* with a strong emphasis, and with an expression of astonishment which he did not seek to conceal.

"Yes; I am the happy possessor," replied the man, evidently annoyed at the discovery, although he pretended to be quite indifferent about it.

"By-the-bye, what is your name?" asked Bale, suddenly, "that I may know what to call you."

"My name?—hem!" returned the stranger, with a laugh, somewhat disconcerted at the suddenness of the question, just as he was trying to invent a story about the gun; "at home, they called me Toby."

"And elsewhere?"

"Elsewhere?" repeated Toby, casting his eyes on his interlocutor.

"Well, as you say at home, I fancied that elsewhere you might have another name, or an *alias?*"

Toby laughed, and answered, shaking his head,—

"No, I don't like that. Toby is quite good enough,

and has long stood me in good stead. I fancy it will answer my purpose for the future too. My father's name was Brown."

"Consequently, Toby Brown, Esquire?"

"Esquire would sound after my name just as well as after that of many another Brown or Smith," said Toby. "But here we leave such terms to swells and other people who receive and write letters. As long as I am a servant I shall be 'Toby:' if once I become my own master, and have my own flocks and herds, I shall, of course, put the 'Master' before."

"Thank you," said Bale, laughing. The droll humour of the fellow had somewhat restored his temper. "Where," added he, "did you get the gun from, if I may ask?"

"Hem! Your shepherd has also been asking so anxiously," replied Toby, knitting his brows, "as if a fellow could not pay for a decent gun, just as well as any of the swells. Instead of drinking my wages in one of those accursed bush taverns, I have bought this gun. The blacks in the bush are but too apt to rifle you of everything you have about you, if they take it into their heads."

"Well, it is no business of mine. You understand me, then; when Miller returns, you will tell him, in case I should not see Hendricks, to come to the station to-morrow morning at the latest."

"Very well; but don't forget the tobacco!"

Bale replaced the gun against the wall, and went out, followed by Toby, just as M'Donald was approaching.

"The devil!" exclaimed Toby, in astonishment, entirely forgetting his lame leg, and starting back; "why, there is an old acquaintance!"

"Indeed! I suppose you knew Mr. M'Donald in Miranda?" said Bale.

"Mr. M'Donald?—certainly—and surely he can't have forgotten old *Toby*,"—with a strong emphasis on the word, and fixing his eye upon M'Donald.

"I should say not," replied M'Donald, with a smile. "Where do you come from, *Toby?*"

"From the down country, sir, looking for employment, and which I have luckily found, thanks to the black thieves. May I ask since when *you* left the lower Murray, sir?"

A peculiar smile played round his lips, as if amused at him-

self, but was immediately replaced by the former gravity of expression.

"Only a short time since, and am on my journey eastward," answered M'Donald. "It is very possible that I may break up to-morrow morning."

"All well at home, sir?"

"Thanks," replied M'Donald—"our fate in Australia, scattered in all directions. As you know, the station was broken up. Five have obtained permanent employment; the others are looking for work."

"And yourself, sir?"

"I am looking out for some fit pasture-grounds in the neighbourhood?"

"A good place here, I think."

"I hope so; and also that you may stay, and find it to your advantage. I can tell you, Toby, I am heartily glad to see you here."

"Yes; if I can only settle down quietly," answered Toby. "I have before been well off at many a place, and yet must needs go in search of a better one. But as we grow older we get wiser; and I suppose sense comes with years, as people say, so I may still hope. Can I assist you in anything?"

"No, I thank you," replied M'Donald, moving away; "but," added he, with a smile, "perhaps, I may be of use to you. How are you off for money?"

"A check for twenty pounds, due this day year," replied Toby, laughing, "but in other respects, as usual, empty pockets."

"There is something wherewith to buy a few things you will want in your new position," said M'Donald, throwing him a sovereign. Without waiting for his thanks, and indeed Toby seemed to be in no hurry to acknowledge his obligation, he rode to join the other stock-keepers, who were already preparing to return home.

"You might just as well have thrown your money into a well," said Bale, approaching M'Donald, at the same time giving his men a few orders. "Money is of as much use to these men as a loaded gun is to a child—dangerous both to them and others."

"He will take care not to be long exposed to the temptation," said M'Donald, laughing. "After all, he can get

nothing here in the bush but tobacco, and perhaps a little rum."

"That is true. Then you knew the fellow before: is he trustworthy?"

"I would answer for none of these bushmen," replied M'Donald, not giving a direct, straightforward answer. Most of them have been convicts, and I suppose Toby is no exception. He is reserved about his previous history; and of course one cannot tell by looking at a man's forehead what kind of a person he may be!"

"No, indeed: if such were the case, many of them would not be wandering at liberty through the bush," said Bale.

"I fancy Toby is no worse than the others; the less you trust these people the better."

At this juncture their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the rest of the party. Bale gave Hendricks a few orders, and soon after a portion of the small troop galloped towards the head station, while the rest rode off to their various outposts.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLACK POLICE.

The evening passed gloomily enough at Mr. Powell's. Although the expedition against the blacks had been successful, Mr. Powell was by no means satisfied with the result. George did not show himself at the table; Mr. Bale, who shared the family meal, seemed to be vexed at the loss of his horse; and William had not yet forgotten the lesson he had received from their guest, and which, strangely enough, irritated him the more because he felt that he had deserved it. Is not this often the case with us in the world?

The ladies also spoke but seldom. The blood which had been shed threw a dark veil over the usually so cheerful circle, and they all broke up earlier than common. Bale proposed that the careless hut-keeper should be at once dismissed, to which Mr. Powell of course, in his excited mood, agreed, and thanked the overseer for having found another man to take his place. Miller was to be paid off on the following morning, and Toby installed in his office.

As for the blacks encamped near the station, they had behaved very quietly all day, having been principally engaged fishing. Only a few of the young men had been sent out, Mr. Powell thought, to observe what was going on with the other tribe. Towards evening, these messengers appeared to bring some important news. The burkas assembled, and a long and eager conference, to which Nguyulloman came down from his hill, took place. Mr. Powell naturally thought it related to the defeat of the other tribe, with which these blacks, whatever they might say to the contrary, stood, no doubt, in closer intercourse than they were inclined to acknowledge. However, they had not helped to carry off the sheep; and Mr. Powell did not wish to annoy them, and even ordered two of the slaughtered sheep to be given to them next morning, in return for some fish they had brought in during the afternoon.

Great, therefore, was the astonishment of all the people at the station at finding, on the following morning, the camp abandoned. The fires were still smouldering, but it was evident that the whole tribe must have left at break of day. They seemed to have crossed the river, to which their tracks were traced; and on the opposite shore five or six of the usual bark canoes showed how they had got across. Only one fire was left burning; only one gunyo was yet standing—that of Nguyulloman—on the sand-hill, and the unfortunate cripple, abandoned by his tribe, was sitting alone by his fire. Had the natives fled because they were afraid lest the white men, the report of whose guns they had perhaps heard, should treat them as they had treated the others the day before? How groundless, in that case, was their fear! The direction which they had taken seemed also to indicate that they had nothing to do with the thieves. Sudden, indeed, must have been their flight, or they would not have abandoned this poor wretch to the mercy of the white man!

From them he had, as he knew very well, nothing to fear; and the ladies took a special interest in his welfare. They rejoiced at the prospect of being enabled, in some measure, to atone to him for the wrong inflicted upon him by his own people. Mrs. Powell herself proposed to visit him, and assure him that he need fear neither want nor violence.

In order to enable him to receive ladies in a decent manner, Mr. Powell sent him one of the blue-and-white striped shirts

usually worn by the labouring men. He put it on with evident satisfaction, although the wrong way, until assisted by the hut-keeper in his toilet.

Nguyulloman's reception of the ladies, who were accompanied by Mr. Powell and M'Donald, was cold and monosyllabic. He appeared to be much depressed and annoyed at the flight of his tribe, and anxious as to the manner in which the white people would behave in consequence. When assured that he should receive his ration of meat daily until his people returned to fetch him, and when Mr. Powell, moreover, added that he would take care that he should have plenty of wood for his fire, his reserve perceptibly decreased, and he became more talkative. The latter promise turned out, however, to be unnecessary, as shortly after a little fellow, between eight or ten years old, came out of the bush with a lot of dry wood for his fire. The natives had at least taken care to supply him with the necessary fuel.

As regarded the departure of the tribe, he professed to know no more than the white men themselves. He said the burkas had kept their intention secret until they broke up. Separated as he was from their camp, he naturally enough could not tell what they had planned together.

The probable cause of their flight did not, however, long remain a mystery. The party were still standing by the solitary gunyo on the top of the hill, whence they could command an extensive view over the low valley of the river, when they saw a cloud of dust rising in the distance, and immediately after a troop of horsemen came in sight.

"What is that?" exclaimed M'Donald, first perceiving the approach of the strangers, with surprise. "Can they be cattle-drivers taking their cattle to market at a time when there is a scarcity of grass?"

"No," said Mr. Powell; "perhaps it is a new squatter settling on the Murray; but I can only distinguish horses. Are your eyes better, Nguyulloman?"

Nguyulloman had long noticed the new-comers; nay, if his guests had observed him attentively, they would have seen that he had expected them the whole morning; for he sat with his face turned in the direction in which they first appeared, and his looks, even while he spoke, were seldom taken from that spot.

"They are only horses," replied the black, poking his fire, and looking from the new-comers to his visitors.

"And drivers with them?"

"A man upon each."

"All horsemen? That is scarcely possible. Why, where can they come from, or what is their destination?"

"They are blacks," he replied, pointing in the direction in which they were visible, and adding, with maledictions in his own language, "Blacks who sold themselves to the white men, in order to hunt their own brethren."

"The black police!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with astonishment. "I have often heard of them, but never saw, and still less expected them on the Murray. If they had come but one day sooner," he added, with a deep sigh, "they would have spared us many a sad remembrance. I should like to know what can bring them into this part of the country, unless they are making a tour of inspection along the banks of the Murray, and wish to show the blacks that, in case of necessity, they are at hand."

"I thank God they are here!" said Sarah. Their presence, will, I hope, prevent any further attack from the blacks, should they entertain the idea of avenging yesterday's deeds."

"My dear child," said Mr. Powell, calming her apprehensions, "we should not have any reason to fear, even were they not here. We are quite strong enough to brave the largest tribe of the blacks, if they intend attacking us. But they do not think of anything of the sort, and we need not alarm ourselves in this respect."

"I do not know," returned the girl. "There has been such a weight on my breast since yesterday! I did not like to make you uneasy, and therefore said nothing about it; but the forebodings of some great misfortune hung upon me. With such a reinforcement, I feel quite at my ease, and I hope all will pass off well. Don't you think so too, Mr. M'Donald?"

"Yes, Miss, yes—I—hope so," replied the young man, uneasily.

"Then you entertained similar apprehensions?" exclaimed Sarah, quickly, and with an expression of alarm.

"No," replied M'Donald, turning his eyes from the new-comers. "I suppose these men will stop here; shall we go down and have a look at them, Mr. Powell?"

"Certainly. Nguyulloman, send your boy to the house; he shall have meat for both of you, although I am not now inclined to think," he added, with a smile, turning to his party, "that it is from fear that our black neighbours ran away. These fellows are troubled with bad consciences, and they are said to stand in special dread of the black police." Having said this, he descended the hill, followed by the whole of the party.

"Father," said 'Lisbeth, laughing, and taking his arm, "you should not have let the black cripple know that you were not aware of the coming of the black police; just think, how they would stand in awe of you, if they thought that assistance came the moment you required it."

"As you are so wise, my child," replied her father, with a smile, "why did you not give me the hint before? Of course, that would have been the most prudent plan."

"It did not strike me before," answered 'Lisbeth, laughing.

"And that was just the case with me," Mr. Powell observed, gaily.

"You have become very grave, Mr. M'Donald," said Sarah, as they descended the hill.

The individual thus addressed was walking silently at her side. Her mother had hastened into the house, to give out rations for the blacks, who would naturally expect some refreshment.

"Grave! and did you ever see me otherwise?"

"Oh yes, indeed," answered Sarah, blushing slightly. "When you came here for the first time you were very different,—full of spirits and humour, nay, almost to excess."

"We grow older, and gravity comes with years."

"Not with these years, I hope," replied Sarah, with a smile; "that would be too soon, and we must not appear old before our time. But what is the matter with your foot? You are lame. I hope you were not wounded yesterday?" she added, with anxiety.

"No—no," replied the young man, at the same time acknowledging the kind inquiry with a grateful look. "It is only a trifle. As we were riding very fast, I struck my foot against a fallen tree, and now it hurts me. I think there is a boot-store at the station, and a larger pair will soon give me ease."

"By-the-bye, M'Donald," said Mr. Powell, stopping, and

turning towards the young man; "I have a favour to ask of you—or rather a proposal, for if you do not like to agree to it, I should not endeavour to persuade you to do so."

"Anything I can do for you——"

"Nay, make no promises beforehand. I only wanted to ask you whether you would part with your grey?"

"My grey?"

"I know it is a good horse; but horses change owners, and I will tell you why I want the animal. I have plenty of horses myself; but Mr. Bale lost his yesterday, and I feel convinced that I could not please him better than by giving him the grey. Name your price,—that is, if you feel inclined to part with him: I have no doubt we shall easily come to an agreement."

"I think so, too," said M'Donald, smiling. "The grey is a good horse; but I like your bay I rode yesterday and the day before, just as well; and, if it suits you, we will make an exchange."

"In that case, you will be the loser by it."

"I do not think so; he jumps beautifully, and is just the sort of horse for the bush. *I* shall be perfectly satisfied with the exchange."

"Well, if you are, so am I," replied Mr. Powell, "and am, moreover, extremely obliged to you for your kindness. The bay is yours, then, and the grey mine."

"And so the affair is concluded," added M'Donald.

"That is what I call making a bargain quickly," Sarah observed, cheerfully; "and I am sure it will be a great surprise for Mr. Bale."

"I think he is going to his station to-day?" said M'Donald.

"To his station? No," replied Mr. Powell; "he is going to look out for some cattle we have long missed the traces of, which one of the stock-keepers says he discovered lately in the neighbourhood. Perhaps he may be lucky enough to find them at once: perhaps it may take him a whole week. I only detained him in order to speak to you about the horse. It is very possible you may not see your grey for a good while."

"I hope, in that case, that the bay will answer my purpose equally well."

The conversation was here interrupted by the clatter of the hoofs of the horsemen, who were turning round the corner of

the fence, just as the two gentlemen reached the open space before the house. At the same moment, Miller, Mr. Powell's late hut-keeper, arrived at the station from the opposite side, and approached his master with an embarrassed air. He knew very well that, according to law, and the terms of his engagement, he was not entitled to one penny of his wages, as the value of the sheep lost through his neglect might be deducted therefrom; and he was, moreover, in his master's debt for many little things required in the bush. It depended entirely on Mr. Powell's kindness whether he would give him anything; at any rate, he was firmly resolved not to ask for a farthing.

For the moment the settler's attention was too much attracted by the black cavalry to notice the hut-keeper, who waited at a respectful distance. They were, indeed, a wild troop—the terror of the bushranger, which each man of the band seemed to know, and of which all were proud enough.

At their head rode a sergeant, a white man, dressed in a sort of blue light-dragoon uniform—a short jacket, trousers with red stripes down the side, a light foraging-cap, a sabre by his side, pistols in the holsters, and a carbine. He was followed by his black squadron, keeping neither order nor rank, but riding in great confusion. They were about sixteen strong, all dressed alike. A small minority of them seemed to have become so far civilized as to wear a cap; but all stood barefooted in their stirrups. Their long hair streamed wildly over their shoulders, and their large, black, glittering eyes watched everything they saw. Some of them had spurs buckled on their bare feet, whilst others used a short, strong riding-whip, suspended round the wrist by a leathern strap.

They were not all armed alike; and probably only those who understood the management of firearms were provided with them. Most of them, however, had pistols, and all were armed with sabres. The black troop looked very curiously as they rode past the forsaken encampment of their countrymen and perceived the forms of the two natives left behind. Their seat on horseback, as far as solidity and ease were concerned, was excellent; but the upper part of their body was never quiet for a moment. Continually bending over to one side or the other, talking and laughing, they nevertheless kept their animals well in hand, and seemed as if they had been accus-

tomed to the saddle from youth, and not for a few years, and the majority only for a few months.

The sergeant could easily distinguish the master of the station among the company, and, waving his hand to his troop as a signal to halt, he quickly advanced towards Mr. Powell. When within twenty paces, he made a military salute, jumped from his horse, threw the bridle over his arm, and, approaching Mr. Powell—

"Have I the honour to speak to Mr. Powell?" he asked, with his hand still touching his cap.

"That is my name. You and your men are heartily welcome," was the hospitable answer. "I hope you are not engaged in such severe and hasty duty as to be obliged to leave my station immediately."

"Thank you, sir, no; on the contrary, I have orders to encamp in the neighbourhood until our lieutenant, who has remained behind, joins us."

"So much the better. Your men shall get what they require; and I suppose it will not be a violation of your duties for you to take up your quarters at my house."

The sergeant acknowledged the hospitable offer with a slight bow.

"What is the name of your officer?"

"Lieutenant Walker."

"Indeed! An old acquaintance, then, if I mistake not. Do you not remember Lieutenant Walker, of Sydney," added he, turning to his daughter, "who once accompanied us in a trip to Paramatta?"

"I think I do," replied the beautiful girl, and a slight blush covered her cheeks for an instant; but it disappeared as quickly as it came. "As far as I can remember, he had then just entered the force."

"You are quite right, Miss," said the sergeant. "He afterwards distinguished himself in an affair with a desperate gang of bushrangers, and received a medal and his commission of first lieutenant."

"We shall be glad to have the pleasure of seeing him again," said Mr. Powell. "But pray get your men into their quarters. You seem to have had a long ride; the horses look very tired. May I ask whither you are bound?"

"That is no secret," replied the sergeant. "A small band

of bushrangers, in the swamps of the Hindmarsh, under a very enterprising leader, have been committing numerous depredations. We have scattered this band, and taken most of them prisoners. The remainder were driven into the bush, where they were probably surrounded by the white mounted police, and put out of harm's way. Very likely their chief was among them. But some—particularly two, the very worst of criminals, transported for life for the most heinous offences—fled northward into the bush, and it is possible, although unlikely, that they may cross the desert and reach the Murray. To prevent that, a reconnaissance has been ordered along the Murray, to put the settlers upon their guard, in case these men should, after all, make their appearance. At present, they are still in the malley-bush, unless the blacks have done us the kindness to rid the colonies of these plagues of human society. Has anything happened about here, sir?"

"We had a slight skirmish yesterday with a gang of blacks, who broke into our yards; but I will tell you all about it presently. Pray see that your men are made comfortable; perhaps they will be able to make use of the camp abandoned by the tribe only this morning: the gunyoes are still there. I fancy your men scared them away."

"Very possibly," replied the sergeant, laughing. "They have a most awful respect for my black fellows, and generally retire into the bush whenever we come near. I shall avail myself of your kindness."

"One of my sons will give you the necessary provisions. The blacks have taken good care we should have plenty of meat on hand."

"So much the better; at least, we can turn it to account," said the soldier, laughing; and, with a polite bow to Mr. Powell and his company, he remounted and returned to his troop, to lead them off to their quarters.

George, who had come to look at the new-comers, at a sign from his father, accompanied them, to show them where to put the horses for the night.

As soon as the blacks had seen their steeds properly provided for, they set about preparing their own camp. They made use of the sheets of bark which their countrymen had left behind; but the old encampment did not suit them. Exactly as the wolf-dog would not choose the same spot on

which his ancestor, the wolf, had reposed, so did these degenerate, scarcely half-civilized children of the wilderness despise the resting-place of their countrymen; nay, they even moved away with disgust from the remains of the old encampment. They carried the bark some distance from the previous camp; but, on account of the water, close to the river-side.

Strangely enough, the black tribes had no more bitter or dangerous enemies in the whole extent of the Australian continent than this black police. These, however, form no exception to a rule prevalent in all nature, and under the most different conditions. The negro is hated, and whenever opportunity offers, persecuted, by no race so much as by the mulatto, in whose veins the same blood flows; the Christians, descended from the Jews, are almost always the most bitter enemies of the latter; among the heathen tribes, none behave with so much violence and cruelty towards them as those of their own who have been converted. Even in the animal kingdom the same law holds good. The wolf, for instance, has no more terrible enemy than his bastard son, the wolf-dog. Why do things happen thus? Who can tell? Thus it was with these blacks, most of whom had entered the force with no other object than that of getting a horse, arms, and plenty to eat. They were never happier than when let loose upon one of the native tribes; and few white men would have dared to practise such cruelties as these aborigines inflicted upon their fellows.

Engaged as they were, for the present, in a sort of friendly mission—since such a reconnaissance could scarcely be considered anything more than a pleasant trip through the forest—the blacks gave themselves up entirely to that which constitutes a native's highest enjoyment—plenty to eat and nothing to do. As soon as the camp was formed, and fuel had been gathered for the night, part of them sat at the fire, chatting and laughing, whilst others sauntered about the station, and at last went to Nguyulloman to pay him a visit. Some of them were, no doubt, acquainted with this strange being.

It was curious to see how carefully they noticed everything that came in their way. Not a horse, not a head of cattle, escaped their keen scrutiny. First of all, they invariably examined the "brand," and sometimes compared it with

others which they drew upon the sand. Three or four of them would then gather round such a rough sketch, chattering and gesticulating with the greatest animation, until something else attracted their attention. From old habits, they particularly noticed the various foot-tracks, here crossing each other in all directions, although few of them could be clearly made out. Some they measured with their fingers and knuckles; and they were particularly delighted at seeing the small, pretty foot-prints made by the ladies.

Nguyulloman received the visit with all the dignity naturally belonging to the sole representative of his tribe. This did not, however, prevent him from begging, without ceremony, some tobacco. To their questions, he only vouchsafed laconic and evasive answers; and when they at last insisted upon knowing where his tribe had gone, he complained bitterly at their leaving him to the mercy of the white man, without even a piece of resin or anything else to eat. Their destination they probably did not know themselves. They might have gone to hunt wallobies; and he declared that he thought it likely they would be back on the morrow or the day after.

One of them invited him to their camp. At first he excused himself, and was only with great difficulty prevailed upon to accept of the invitation. It was evidently an effort on his part, and he went very slowly, stopping occasionally and groaning. At last they left him to follow alone, and at his leisure.

These blacks wore the sabre as long as they were on duty. Many, no doubt, unaccustomed to its use, found it but an inconvenient weapon; although it flattered their vanity to hear it rattling at their side. Many of them carried for their private use the boomerang—a flat, curved piece of wood, which returns to the place from which it is thrown. They used this as a weapon in their fights with "rebellious" blacks, as well as, in the forest, against wallobies and opossums, which the black police pursued with just as much eagerness as they did escaped criminals or dangerous aborigines.

Five or six of them set out to look for some booty of the sort, which they hoped to find in the neighbourhood, whilst others went to the river to fish. It was a curious sight afforded by those dark forms, with their blue jackets and trousers, bareheaded and barefooted, stealthily and silently

standing by the river-side or creeping through the forest, examining the barks of the trees in order to discover traces of opossums, and the ground for the tracks of wallobies.

The sergeant left his men to their occupations, certain of their obedience. He had only to appoint the time and place for their return, and he knew perfectly well that they would be punctual. Their own natural tendencies would induce them not to let any opportunity slip offered by their leisure to examine everything that took place in the environs. Like so many well-trained hounds, they scoured the country in all directions, and no new foot-track, no cattle with a different brand, escaped their searching looks.

CHAPTER IX.

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL.

WHILST the majority of the newly-arrived black frontier-guards were thus occupied, a few of them remained in the camp to examine the arms. They vainly endeavoured to extort anything of interest out of Nguyulloman. Either the cripple really knew nothing respecting the route taken by his tribe, or he was cunning enough to conceal his knowledge. Meantime, Miller had approached the squatter, and been dismissed from his service.

"Ah! You are the hut-keeper of the dry swamp, are you not?" asked Mr. Powell, who was much too good-natured to receive the man unkindly. Indeed, he was already sorry at having given his consent to his dismissal.

"I *was*," replied Miller quietly; "and I am truly sorry, Mr. Powell, that my negligence should have caused you to suffer a loss."

"Perhaps?"

"After all, if I had been awake," replied Miller, with a shrug of his shoulders, "I could have done nothing against the whole swarm of blacks; and very likely I should have had a spear run through me into the bargain. I know I am in fault, and I only hope you will be more satisfied with the new hut-keeper than you have been with me."

"Go to my son," said Mr. Powell, wishing to break off

this conversation, "and ask him for your wages. You have been with me about ten or twelve months."

"If you deduct the value of the sheep that were lost, there will be little remaining."

"I do not intend to do that," was the kind reply. "In God's name, take your wages in full; but at the same time, let this be a warning to you to be more careful in your next situation than you have been here. Where do you mean to go?"

"To Adelaide."

"Have you any acquaintances there?"

"Acquaintances? No," replied Miller, in a low voice; "but a family."

"A family!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with surprise. "Do you really mean to say that you are married?"

"I have a wife and child."

Mr. Powell shook his head.

"And you have been all this time in the bush, and never, at least to my knowledge, sent them a line, nor received letters from them? I cannot understand that."

"In former times, I should perhaps not have understood it either," replied the German, gloomily; "but here, in the bush, one seems dead to everything else. Perhaps," he added, half aloud, and as if speaking to himself, "I may become another man yet."

The wild and peculiar expression on the countenance of this man as he uttered these words quite struck Mr. Powell. He had before taken little or no notice of his hut-keeper, with whom he came but seldom in contact, and then only for a few minutes. Suddenly he fancied that a different kernel was enclosed in this rough shell than he had imagined.

"Pray, what profession did you follow before you came to Australia?" he asked. "I believe you have not been many years in the colonies."

Miller smiled bitterly; and after short silence he said—

"I was a fool not to know when I was well off. I have atoned for my fault, both I and——; but these are old stories, and many a one who now lives in the bush in his tattered jacket might tell similar ones."

It is a very delicate matter in Australia to inquire into the past life of anybody with whom one is not well acquainted. The majority of the labouring classes consisted, at least only

a few years ago, of nothing but convicts, who were either liberated or provided with tickets of leave. Therefore, in making such inquiries, one was continually in danger of hitting upon a very unfortunate and unpalatable topic. In the case of foreigners, this danger did not exist, as they were very seldom transported from England to the penal settlements. Nevertheless, Mr. Powell felt he had touched a painful chord in the man's breast; and with the delicacy which was peculiar to him, and which even the long sojourn among such wild and coarse natures had not been able to blunt, he said, in a friendly manner,—

"Most of us have been thoughtless in youth, and it is well when we let these early follies be a warning to us. I have no intention of dealing severely with you, nor of reproaching you with the past. It is over, and no more need be said about it. Do you intend going to Adelaide alone?"

"I have no choice," replied Miller.

"I do not think there is any danger at present, while the black police are near the river. Even the solitary pedestrian will not be stopped or plundered by a daring tribe. If you are afraid to go, I will not send you away. You can remain here at the station until you find company, or, perhaps, part of the black police will return there. Until then you are my guest, and one of the shepherds shall take you into his hut."

"Mr. Powell," said the German, scarcely able to master his feelings, which seemed to be those of emotion and shame, "I thank you heartily for your friendly offer, but—— I must not abuse your kindness. The other men would despise me as a useless hand—the overseer hates me as it is. Accept my most heartfelt thanks for your generosity; be assured I feel your kind treatment of the stranger more deeply than you may perhaps think. I shall never forget it."

He made a movement as if to take his master's hand, but checked himself, saluted him respectfully, and went towards the house to receive his wages. They were at once paid to him by George Powell, and he then went to the store to buy some tobacco, and a pair of new boots, which he required for his long journey.

In the storehouse stood M'Donald, who was also trying on a pair of boots he had just bought.

"They are far too large for you," said the youngest

Powell, Ned, who usually managed the concerns of the store-house and helped his father to keep the books.

"I do not think so," replied the guest. "I like boots to be comfortable; and these fit me."

"They will rub your skin off: you had better take a smaller number."

"No, I shall try these. Ah, Miller! you are going to leave the station?"

"I am. Will you, Mr. Powell, have the kindness to let me have a pound of tobacco, and a pair of good bush-boots?"

"Choose a pair; and here is a pound of tobacco."

"How much is it?"

"You will find the price of every article marked on that board. Can you read?"

"A little," replied Miller, as he stepped up to the board, upon which the price of every article was marked.

"Has the ration-waggon gone out?" M'Donald asked the young shopman, while Miller was examining the list of prices.

"No; it will start about noon; but if you have any commission, Mr. Bale is going to ride out, and, if I mistake not, he is just saddling his horse."

"Will he pass by the sheep-station?"

"Yes; he has just fetched a pound of tobacco for the new hut-keeper."

"It was mere curiosity;—I will, however, see him off. I should like to know how he likes the grey."

"Then you will have to make haste. I do not think he will pass the house. Indeed, the boots are too large for you."

"Oh, by no means. They fit me capitally, and are quite comfortable. Well, I shall look out for him."

Miller placed the money for the boots and tobacco on the counter, and was about to say good-bye and leave the store-house, when Ned said—

"Do you intend to go down the river?"

"I think so," replied he. "Farewell!"

"Stop; take a glass of something before you go. You will have to walk a good distance before you can get anything." At the same time he fetched a bottle, and poured out half a tumbler of cognac.

"Thank you, I never drink brandy," replied Miller. At

the same time, however, he cast a longing glance at the glass in which the dark-brown liquid sparkled most alluringly.

"Well, it won't do you any harm; you have a long journey before you," said the young man, good-naturedly. "I suppose father has paid you?"

"To the last penny. He is a man of honour."

"Well, drink this to his health, then; and I wish you a pleasant and prosperous journey."

Miller approached the table, took the glass, held it a moment to the light, and drawing a deep sigh, before he set it to his lips, emptied it at one draught.

Ned fancied that Miller's eyes grew moist, as he shook the young man heartily by the hand, and hastily left the station. On arriving at the last fence, where the bush commenced, he stopped, looked back once more, and then proceeded on his long and solitary journey. The bush had scarcely closed upon him, when one of the black police force crept out from a thicket in which he had been concealed, gazed after him, and then carefully examined his foot-marks. This seemed fully to satisfy him, and, without looking back, he struck out on the broad track which led to the station.

Miller had not noticed the fellow, nor would he, in all probability, have paid any attention to him if he had happened to catch a glance of him. Absorbed in his own not very cheerful thoughts, he quietly pursued his journey, until he had arrived at a pretty considerable distance from the station, and reached a small open space commanding a view of the river. Then he threw the small bundle in which he carried some linen and clothes, as well as his woollen blanket, upon the ground, sat down under a gum-tree, and, with his hands folded on his right knee, stared for awhile fixedly and silently before him.

"This must change," he muttered at last. "This sort of life must have an end—for myself, my wife, and my child. Good God! to what have I been reduced?" A dismissed hut-keeper, owing his wages only to the generosity and pity of a stranger. And my wife! Brought up in splendour and luxury, she is now wasting her life in sorrow and misery in a foreign land! Good God! To what has this accursed drink, and my frightful, horrible recklessness, led me? But it must change,—it *must*."

He buried his face in his hands, and threw himself upon

the ground, to cool his burning brow in the sand. In a few minutes he rose again, and pushed the damp hair off his pale face. It seemed as if another and more peaceful spirit had come over him; and tears relieved his heart.

"I *will* lead a better life," he continued, in a low and resolute voice. "It is not yet too late; I may still at least make some amends for my wrongs—my sins. My wife will forgive me; and with the small capital which I can now call my own, I can, I *must* begin something. I am healthy and strong. I will work; I will employ my mental powers, my physical ones, if that should be necessary. There is always a demand for industrious workmen in Australia; and what others can do, I must. Australia is a young and flourishing country. When, by industry and perseverance, I have again risen to the rank which I have lost, I may return to my native land, to my home.—To my *home!*" he repeated, sadly; and it seemed as if at the thought of what he had lost—what he had thrown away—a bitter, a deep sorrow seized upon him. But he soon shook it off. Good intentions seemed to give him strength. He wiped the tears from his eyelids, and lifting his pack and blanket from the ground —(his goods and chattels were not heavy to carry)—he resumed his journey through the forest, and with quick and firm steps hastened towards the west, his new goal.

The sergeant had in the meantime obtained from Mr. Powell a list of all his people, with their ages and names. The information, however, led to no satisfactory results. Most of the men had been at the station three or four years, and were well-behaved, honest fellows. The man who had left that very day was a German, going to Adelaide, and Culloch, the sergeant, had seen him himself. Only one new hand was on the station. Mr. Powell knew nothing about this man, and Mr. Bale, who might have given some information, had left on business, and was not expected to return for some days. Mr. Powell recollected that Bale told him Mr. M'Donald had met the man before. To the sergeant's inquiries about him, M'Donald replied that for some time the man called Toby had been under his orders at a station on the Murray, and

that he was satisfied with him. He had been obliged to leave on account of a fight with a shepherd.

"Bah!" exclaimed the sergeant, laughing; "if that is all, there is not much harm"—apparently quite satisfied on the subject. Upon more mature reflection, he nevertheless determined, without saying anything about it, upon sending one of his black fellows to have a look at the man. On the arrival of his lieutenant, he must be prepared to give him a faithful account of everything, and he was accordingly anxious that nothing should be left undone.

The conversation turned upon horses and cattle, the form of the neighbouring settlers' brands, which the sergeant carefully noted in his book. Sarah grew tired of this, and walking up to M'Donald, who was leaning against the window listening to the conversation, she said—

"If you do not feel a very particular interest in the different brands under discussion, and if, as I hope you are, indifferent whether this or that stray cow has a horn more or less crumpled, and this or that stray horse a larger or smaller white star on the forehead, I shall be obliged if you will accompany me to the river-side. I should like to get personally acquainted with this black police, of which I have heard so many strange adventures. Perhaps 'Lisbeth will go with us?"

"I cannot, Sarah," her sister replied; "you know I am housekeeper this week, and I have so much to do and attend to."

"Well, we must go alone, then," Sarah answered, laughing, and taking hold of the arm gladly offered to her. "With such an escort, I am sure I shall have nothing to fear!"

With an elastic step, the beautiful girl walked by the side of her companion over the open space around the houses. They proceeded in the direction of the camp, where the blacks had again assembled to receive the provisions sent from the station, as well as to prepare the game they had obtained in the chase. Some were busy cutting branches of the malley-bush for lances, straightening them over the fire, intending to use them as harpoons in fishing. They knew not, of course, how long they might be kept here, and they wished to be employed all the time. When they had no enemy to pursue

or to track, they might at least indulge in the pleasures of the chase.

"What a strange people they are!" Sarah remarked, as they walked slowly between the bark huts and the blacks. "They will always be wild as long as they live, in spite of the uniform."

"What astonishes me most," said M'Donald, "is, that they can consent to confine themselves in these tight clothes. From what I had before seen of them, this seemed to me to be the greatest obstacle to their adopting a civilized sort of life."

"Father has often tried to reclaim them, by giving them good and regular food. I only know of one instance of a black who could be persuaded to keep the sheep three or four months, and at the expiration of that time he gave it up too."

"Still, there are black shepherds here and there on the Murray."

"They are exceptions to the general rule, then," replied Sarah. "We once tried it with the girls. We took them quite young, and they offered no objection to being dressed, and they did all their work with great punctuality; but as soon as they had attained a certain age, they could not be restrained, threw off everything we had given them, and returned to the bush, and were never seen again."

They had now passed the camp, and they walked some distance down the river. Sarah looked back towards the blacks.

"Observe how carefully they are examining our tracks," she said, laughing; "they seem to take more interest in our foot-prints than in our persons."

"They consider us only as game, and nothing better. If they were ever set upon our tracks, for whatever cause, they would follow them with as much eagerness and certainty as the bloodhound does his victim: indeed, man is the most cruel, merciless creature under the sun. The animal at least spares its master, and only kills when in need of prey; but man pursues and kills frequently only for the sake of pleasure —a whim, the excitement of the moment.

"You are certainly right," Sarah replied, with a sigh; "and," she added, with a smile, "I would not, on that account, marry a hunter."

"We are all hunters," replied M'Donald, thoughtfully; "some in pursuit of this, some of that—all hunters or prey in this life; and, indeed, it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other."

"Nor do I approve of what people call chasing in another sense," said Sarah. "In the colonies in particular, men are always in eager pursuit of *gain*, and nothing else; they neither care for life nor health, so that their flocks and herds increase. Capital produces capital, and purse and coffers are filled. And with how very little could we, if we chose, be happy! what small efforts would suffice to satisfy *modest* wants! How the young are worked, and their life endangered, only to procure all that we think necessary for life, and which we shall, perhaps, enjoy only for a few days in our old age! This everlasting struggle only tends to make us and our fellow-creatures miserable—a chase, in our mistaken zeal, after what frequently proves unreal happiness. All we want is, to reach a step upon the ladder higher than that on which God has placed us. And how very unjustly we act in doing this! I, for instance, could be happy with so little."

"And are you not happy, Miss Sarah?" asked M'Donald. "Do you not find in your family all that the heart of a child can want?"

"I will not be unjust, and fall into the failing which I have just censured," Sarah answered, with a smile. "Yes, I am happy now—at least, I should consider it a sin to say I wanted anything; but I feel uneasy that father should have come to such a wilderness only to procure wealth for his children. I am uneasy that my brothers should not learn what civilization requires, and that which their eager mind is so fit to receive. I am, moreover, uneasy that daily they should be exposed to one danger or another, when, with more moderate wants, we might live so quietly and peaceably on some smaller estate in our old home, to which our hearts cling, after all. And, if I really cherish a secret hope, it is some day to see this dream realized, and to live there among my friends, far from all these fears."

During this conversation, they had reached the bank of the river, perhaps three hundred paces distant from the camp of the blacks. At this place it was hollowed out by the waters, and descended almost perpendicularly. The stream sweeping round in a curve, presented a greater surface of

water than at other places, and its stillness and tranquillity impressed the mind with a peculiar feeling of repose. The picture was not deficient in life; for although the blacks had scared away most of the wild-fowl, and neither black swans (with which this was a once favourite place of resort) nor wild ducks, which passed there at rarer intervals, were now to be seen, some long-necked aquatic birds might still be observed watching eagerly for a fish. Among the branches of the gum-tree cooed and fluttered about the pretty crowned pigeon, with its beautiful bushy tuft of feathers on its head; and swarms of white cockatoos were gambolling among the green foliage of the opposite bank.

"What a beautiful scene!" exclaimed M'Donald, as they lingered at this lovely spot and contemplated it for a few minutes. "How happily might life pass away here in peace and quietness, if we were permitted to find peace and quietness in this world!"

The last words were uttered in a low and scarcely audible voice, and a deep sigh relieved his oppressed heart. Sarah looked at him with a feeling of anxiety, and as he continued with downcast eyes, silently, as in a dream, regarding the ground, she let go his arm, the better to gaze into his face, and said,—

"What ails you, Mr. M'Donald? We are strangers to each other, it is true, at least according to the usages of cold, social life; but you know—you must feel—that we *all* of us take the most lively interest in you. If there is anything in which my father—in which we—can assist you, you may rely upon it that we shall not only be willing, but even eager to do so."

"I thank you, Miss Sarah! I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for the feeling of friendship which prompts you," answered M'Donald, with a hasty effort to collect himself, as if ashamed of having given vent to his feelings. "Every one in this world has to bear his little burdens; some more, some less; and every one foolishly fancies his to be the heaviest."

"You do not appear to be a person likely to exaggerate the importance of yours," Sarah replied, in an earnest, almost anxious tone.

"Do not rely too much upon that," continued M'Donald, with a smile intended to dissipate her fears, but which only increased them. "I am, perhaps, weaker than you think."

"I have no right to thrust myself into your confidence," said Sarah, in a low voice; "and still, I know no one I should like better——" She suddenly checked herself, with a blush, and turned towards some screaming cockatoos, that were just flying over their heads towards the river.

"Would you trust me?" asked M'Donald, seizing her hand, which she gave to him, trembling violently. "Me,—a stranger? What if I myself cautioned you against so doing?"

"I should not heed you," said Sarah, with a smile, while two bright tears appeared on her eyelashes; "not more now than before."

"You may believe me, Sarah, when I appear as my own accuser," observed M'Donald, suddenly, as if seized with deep emotion; "but believe not others when they do so. "Keep fast a little of that trust which you put in me, perhaps too rashly. Let me depart hence with the conviction that there is one being in the wide world who takes an interest in me, who thinks of me with a feeling of friendship."

So deep a grief was depicted upon his features as he uttered these words, with almost painful haste, that Sarah, struck with his unexpected emotion, remained silent. Suddenly the sound of hoofs was heard in the bush.

Both looked round, and M'Donald unconsciously let go Sarah's hand. The horseman advanced towards them, and scarcely half a minute after he reached the spot where they were, stopped, and casting a sharp searching look at M'Donald, as if his presence was not peculiarly agreeable to him, said, bowing to Sarah with a friendly smile:—

"I saw your dress through the bushes, Miss, and thank my lucky star which guided me first to you. I cannot but consider it as a good omen."

With these words, he vaulted lightly out of the saddle, gave the reins to one of the black police who had hastened to the spot, without, however, honouring him with a look, and advanced towards the young lady with outstretched hands.

Sarah blushed and shook hands, without, however, speaking a word; and the new-comer continued, laughing:

"Indeed, I do not know whether you recognise me. Since I had the pleasure of seeing you seems to me an age, although it is scarcely more than three years."

"Lieutenant Walker must think my memory very bad," Sarah replied, in a friendly but reserved tone, "if he supposes

that short time could have entirely effaced his name from my recollection."

"Had the separation lasted much longer, you could not have answered for the result?" said the officer, laughing.

"I do not think you know each other," Sarah replied. "Mr. Lieutenant Walker, and, if I mistake not, chief of the black mounted police." The lieutenant bowed, coldly but politely. "Mr. M'Donald, a friend of ours, who surprised us a few days ago by a visit."

M'Donald returned the bow, and the young officer continued, addressing Sarah in a lively manner,—

"You cannot conceive, Miss, with what delight I received orders to lead a troop in this direction; and I should certainly have hastened on before my wild set, had not a disagreeable duty detained me at the last station for several hours."

"My father will be very glad to see you again," said Sarah; "and, if you have no objection, I will go in with you."

"I am ready to follow you whenever you please; but may I venture to offer you my arm over the rough ground?"

"I thank you," said Sarah, in a friendly tone, refusing the proffered assistance; "I know every root here. There comes my father: he has no doubt heard of your arrival. If you will allow me, I will go and prepare everything for your reception;" and with this she quitted the two gentlemen and hastened towards the house.

Mr. Powell had, indeed, been apprised of the arrival of his guest, and was coming to welcome him. They walked towards the house, but M'Donald remained alone by the river-side and, with his arms folded over his breast, leaning against a slender gum-tree, he gazed in silence at the water which flowed at his feet.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIEUTENANT OF THE MOUNTED POLICE.

Lieutenant Walker was a young man of about seven-and-twenty years of age, with a slender but strong and well-knit frame. For a young man, he possessed an extraordinary amount of experience. Born of poor parents, and with but

little prospect of making his way in the old country, he had emigrated to Australia, and entered the force as a private. In those troubled times, he soon distinguished himself; and his coolness and courage attracted the notice of his chiefs. In a fight with the bushrangers, who had assembled in New South Wales in dangerous bands, his superior officer was killed. Walker assumed the command, and without further orders, conducted the expedition in which they were engaged with so much skill and success, that the Governor appointed him second lieutenant. Urged by ambition, and finding interest in the adventurous life in the forests, he devoted all his energies to the execution of his new duties. Nor were opportunities for distinguishing himself altogether wanting. Bold, even to rashness, with a perfect acquaintance with the country, and at the same time endowed with the clearest judgment, he quickly brought criminals to justice. In a short time he became the terror of the bushrangers, and at the first news of his coming they usually left their haunts.

A bold stroke, already alluded to, which he executed with a few of his men against a band of well-armed escaped convicts, obtained for him the medal and the commission of first lieutenant. When the black police was formed, he received the command of a troop of these fellows, ordered to clear the western frontiers of the colony of a nest of daring bushrangers, as well as to keep in check the black tribes, which were troublesome along the Murray.

Fortune had always favoured his undertakings, and seemed also to have remained faithful to him in his last expedition to the swamps of the Hindmarsh, which, as he informed Mr. Powell, immediately after the first greeting, had been crowned with complete success.

Only a few years before, he had made the acquaintance of the Powells at Sydney; and even then the budding bush-rose Sarah made a deep impression upon him. At that time, indeed, his position was too humble to permit him to address the young lady, as he was but just commencing his career. But three eventful years, rich in success for him, had since elapsed. His pay had increased considerably; he occupied a highly respectable position, and might aspire to the hand of the daughter of even a wealthy settler. He fancied that Sarah was not indifferent to him; and, with the love of the daughter and the good-will of the father, he doubted not of

ultimate success. Bold in all his undertakings, he made sure of final victory; nay, he even satisfied himself that he had carried through and brought to a happy conclusion, undertakings more difficult than that of winning a young girl whose heart was already his own.

Who could the stranger be with whom he had found her by the river-side? That one circumstance rendered him uneasy. However, to inquire was his profession; and he hoped soon to obtain from Mr. Powell all necessary information upon this point.

"A friend of the house," Sarah told him. "Bah! Friends of the house are seldom dangerous!" And by a bold attack he still hoped to obtain his end. The time was, however, short. His orders were very precise. Though allowed to spend a few days at any place he thought necessary, he had to give an account of his reasons for so doing; and consequently he had but very little time of which he could dispose. In the first place, he must find out who this stranger was, and in what relation he stood to the family; and then all would be smooth.

"I am heartily rejoiced, my dear Mr. Walker," said Mr. Powell, as they walked towards the house, "to see you, and bid you welcome."

"I promised to come and see you on the Murray."

"Yes," replied the old gentleman, "I know you did; but such promises are constantly made, no doubt sincerely, but circumstances often prevent their fulfilment. We are all dependent upon them, and cannot always follow our inclinations. It is, therefore, so much the more delightful when these can be combined with our duties."

"In the wild and adventurous life which *we* lead," replied the lieutenant, laughing, "everything is possible, and no part of the colonies is safe from our excursions. To-day we are here, to-morrow there; and the 'game' which we have to follow takes good care to keep us in motion. On the whole, from what I heard, I thought your station much more lonely."

"*Your* men have brought life into it," replied Mr. Powell, with a smile; "for usually it is indeed still and lonely enough here, and I really sometimes pity my poor girls, who are deprived in the bush of almost all the pleasures of youth."

"But you have frequent visitors?"

"Not many. Most strangers going this way are not of

a character to hold much intercourse with. Food and shelter for a night is all that 'bundlemen,' as they are called here, who, with their little bundle on their back, go from one station to another to look out for work, and belong to the scum of our Australian population, require."

"I know the fellows well enough," said Walker. "Nine-tenths of them are liberated convicts, and the remaining tenth little better. These fellows wander far and wide. Indeed, the police stations along the Murray ought to be much more numerous than they are, if it were only on their account."

"Nevertheless, we very seldom hear of any robbery or burglary. Most crimes of the sort are committed by the blacks."

"You had a skirmish with them yesterday?" asked Walker.

"I am sorry to say we had," replied Mr. Powell. "It always grieves me to see the poor wretches roughly treated. We apply our standard of right and justice to them, and the poor devils invariably get the worst of it."

"They fare worse when I set *my* blacks at them," said Walker, laughing, and stopping to look back at his troop. "But, speaking of guests, the gentleman whom I met by the river-side with Miss Sarah seems to have stayed behind. Is he a relation of yours?"

"No; he is a friend of ours, who visited us once before, about a year ago, and for whom we all have taken a great liking. His name is M'Donald."

"M'Donald? This name is frequently met with in the old country. You do not happen to know from what part of the world he comes?"

"No; he never mentions his family, and I have not asked him any questions on that point."

"In the colonies," said Walker, laughing, "one soon acquires the habit of not touching upon the past of our neighbours, even with the safest people. I suppose he has a station here in the west?"

"He has not yet taken one; but is looking out for a suitable run."

"God be thanked!" thought Walker, within himself; "only a passing acquaintance, which will not prove very dangerous."

The two gentlemen entered the house together, and Walker

was most warmly welcomed by Mrs. Powell and Elizabeth. Many a pleasant recollection of the busy life in the metropolis was revived by his presence; and he could also give them information about many persons who were dear to them.

Walker, having been accustomed from his youth to mingle with society, and forced by his profession to mix alternately with *all* ranks, at once made himself at home at Mr. Powell's. Before the evening closed, he had become as free and sociable with them all as if he had belonged for many years to the family.

Towards evening, his duties called him away from the family circle; and he had a long conversation with the sergeant about instructions concerning the movements of his troop and his own designs, which he had not as yet communicated to the family.

The sergeant, in the first place, gave his commanding officer an account of all that he had observed on his way, referring chiefly to the people engaged at the station. Information was easily and quickly obtained by means of a list which the sergeant had procured from the book-keeper. It contained the names and ages of all those persons who had been in service there. Walker himself met the dismissed hut-keeper on his way to the station.

The only stranger, therefore, at the station was the hut-keeper engaged in the place of Miller. The sergeant had already sent one of his black troop to obtain all the necessary information concerning this man. It was not impossible that he belonged to the band which had been scattered in the marshes, and might have made his way to this place. At any rate, the black police had come to the Murray for the purpose of searching the whole country; and it was a part of their duty not to leave any stranger unnoticed.

"Very well," said Walker, after hearing the report; "we must wait for your messenger, and, as soon as he comes, you will break up with the troop, and march to the Darling. Mid-way, you can stop a day to search the country, and I will overtake you on the Darling. Four of the men can stay here with me."

"You have not heard yet, sir," asked the sergeant, "what has become of our best prey. Has he been caught?"

"I think he has," replied Walker; "at least, such was the report a short time since: I shall hear more about this

matter either to-day or to-morrow. I left my servant at the last station, that we might receive the letter as soon as possible."

"I should be sorry to lose the reward," observed the sergeant, with vexation: "we always have the hardest work first, and those who come after us, have nothing to do but to skim the cream off the milk. I thought that we should make nothing of it."

"It matters little, so that he is caught," said Walker, shrugging his shoulders. "However, we may make some prize-money, after all. I should not be surprised if that new hut-keeper turned out to be that rascal, 'Red John,' as the bushrangers call him; and there is a reward of 100*l.* on his head too. At any rate, he has a gun."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the astonished sergeant: "how did you learn that?"

"The German I met as I was coming to the station, and who held the situation before, told me so."

"He has a spite against him, then," said the sergeant, with a shrug of the shoulders. "It cannot be Red John. He has lived in the woods several years now, and the gentleman who is here, M'Donald, knew this fellow at a station on the Murray."

"Be that as it may," answered Walker, "this Red John is still at large, and, to all appearances, has fled to the Murray. If we once get upon his tracks, he will not be able to escape. At any rate, the game is surrounded; and I still think, that wherever we find this fellow, a few of his former comrades will turn up at the same time."

"So much the better, and welcome too," replied the sergeant. "My blacks long for something to do."

"By-the-bye," said Walker, as he was about to break up the conference, "where did the tribe that was encamped here yesterday go to? I suppose you have sent to ascertain?"

"Certainly. They crossed the river, and kept to the bush for some distance; but they afterwards turned and crossed the river again, higher up, no doubt to form a junction with the band who carried off the sheep a few days since."

"I thought so. I saw their tracks about four miles off, although they had all jumped over the path. But they left a spy behind."

"He can scarcely be called a spy—a poor devil of a cripple, with legs like a skeleton's, which he cannot use. Very likely they suddenly got wind of our coming, and could not take him away with them. He is still yonder."

"Very well. As soon as your messenger returns from the sheep-station, let me know. Whom have you sent?"

"Kuyunko. He is acquainted with most of these fellows, as he belongs to a tribe with which they had formerly a great deal of intercourse."

The following morning there was much life and bustle amongst the black police. All the band, with the exception of four, fetched their horses, saddled them, and prepared for the march. One of the troop, whom Walker had left behind, had arrived at full speed with despatches, and the lieutenant was standing by the sergeant, giving him his orders, when M'Donald approached.

"Are you going to leave us already?" he asked, bowing to the young officer.

"Our life is one of motion," answered the latter. "There is no rest for us; and whenever we are comfortable at a place, we are sure to be called away."

"You have received despatches, I see," said M'Donald.

"A fresh start," replied the officer, with vexation.

"That too must have its interest," observed the stranger. "It is, after all, a sort of a hunt, in which you are constantly engaged, and those who take pleasure in it never grow tired, in spite of all troubles and hardships. How very monotonous must a life in these remote stations appear, in comparison with such a mode of existence."

"I should be glad to give it up!" replied Walker. "I have now been a hunter of men for seven years."

"It is a noble pursuit," observed M'Donald, with a smile.

"Noble!" exclaimed Walker, with an expression of contempt. "If you understood it as well as I do, you would not thus misuse the name 'noble.' Of course, novel writers tell us a great deal about generous, noble-minded robbers, who only plundered rich prelates and ministers of state, and gave liberally to the poor. But I fancy the race must be extinct; for the most abominable murders and plunders are the order of the day, whenever a convict breaks his fetters."

"Is there not one good man among them?" asked M'Donald, with a smile. "You gentlemen of the police are too prone to consider every one a rascal who has not proved himself to be an honest man."

"When one comes constantly in contact with the refuse of society—sees nothing but depravity—the most generous mind must, at last, despair of humanity," said the lieutenant. "Even now, scarcely fifteen miles from here, an abominable and horrible murder has been committed!"

"A murder!" exclaimed M'Donald, with horror.

"Attended with circumstances of the most horrid barbarity," continued the officer. "My man has just brought me the news. A traveller, coming from the Darling, has been killed in a bend of the Murray, and not by blacks, but by a white man."

"Have you any suspicion of the direction taken by the murderer?"

"Suspicion?" answered Walker, with an expression of astonishment. "What do I care about suspicion; I shall set six of my bloodhounds on the tracks, and it will be very hard, indeed, if we do not catch him within a few days. My messenger could not stop, I am sorry to say. A few wild dogs attracted his attention, as he was passing, and he found a body, concealed with considerable care, under branches and bark."

"But what makes you suppose that a white man committed the murder?"

"For the simplest reasons. In the first place, the wound was inflicted with a broad knife, such as no blacks carry, and the murderer has taken away his victim's money and *boots*, leaving *his own boots* instead."

"I cannot conceive why he did not throw them all into the river?" said M'Donald. "At any rate, he must have been an inexperienced hand."

"I do not think so," replied Walker. "The river is several miles distant from the place where the deed was committed, and he would have left more tracks, if he had carried the corpse to it, than by concealing it. Had the body remained undiscovered only two days longer, the wild dogs would have mangled it in such a way that no one could have recognised it. Indeed, the murderer's principal aim seems to have been to get away as quickly as possible. He evidently

had no fear of discovery, as he did not know that the black police were so close upon his heels. I will have the fellow hanged, if I should be obliged to follow his tracks for half a year in the bush, in order to accomplish my object. It is the punishment he deserves, and I hold it a point of honour not to leave unavenged a murder committed under the very eyes of the police."

"I hope you will discover the murderer," said M'Donald; "the safety of all is endangered when such wretches are allowed to roam about at liberty."

M'Donald perceived that the lieutenant was pressed for time, and wished to be rid of the presence of a stranger; he therefore walked towards the house, passing a group of blacks, lounging about. M'Donald was not wrong in his surmises. The lieutenant had many things to settle with his sergeant, who received his orders, and soon after rode up the river, accompanied by six of his men. Another party were ordered in an opposite direction, and a few went into the bush.

As Kuyunko, who had been ordered to the sheep-station, had not returned, two men were sent after him. The officer remained alone at the station, and he retired to his room, and spent about an hour writing. When he had done, he went to the parlour to look after Mr. Powell.

Sarah's voice answered his knock, and, on opening the door, he found her alone in the room.

"Excuse my disturbing you, Miss Sarah," said the young officer, casting a hasty glance round the apartment. "I wanted to see your father."

"He went out about half an hour ago, with mother and Elizabeth, to the new paddock," replied Sarah. "Mr. Bale, I hear, has returned with some cattle which had long been missed. He accidently found them in the bush, much quicker than was expected, and father went to look at them. You will be sure to find him there."

Walker stood at the door, irresolute, as if undecided whether to go or stay. Convinced that this favourable opportunity would probably never recur, that, in a day or two, he might be far away, he turned slowly away from the door, and said, with a trembling voice—

"If you will allow me, Miss Sarah, I will wait for him here. Who knows what long expeditions I may soon have

to undertake? A short rest before coming hardships will do me good."

Sarah bowed to him: she wished to answer, but could not utter a word.

It often happens in life, that when some important event is impending, the presentiment entirely takes possession of our minds. Our heart is oppressed, we know not why; our pulse ceases to beat; we can scarcely breathe; and the mind must, at last, make a violent effort to regain its ascendency over the body.

So felt these young people, as they stood together alone. They knew that this moment was decisive for them. Sarah perceived the impression she had made, although quite unwillingly, upon the mind of the young officer; and Walker, who loved the young and beautiful girl with all the ardour of a first attachment, had not relinquished the hope of calling her his own, notwithstanding the reserve of her manners. This he considered to be maiden bashfulness. The decisive moment had arrived. The next day might, perhaps, separate them for months, if not for years. He resolved, at least, to know for certain whether his hopes and dreams had any chance of being realized, or whether he should have to relinquish in despair the hope of winning the heart of the beautiful maiden.

Sarah soon grew collected. She was determined not to let her guest suspect what was going on in her bosom; and, making a violent effort to master her emotion, perhaps also anxious to give him time to speak to her, she took up her bonnet, and said, in a friendly manner,—

"If you have no objection, I will conduct you to them. I wish to speak to my mother about something."

She was about to pass their guest, in order to gain the door: her hand was already upon the latch. Once out, she thought she was safe.

"Miss Sarah!" exclaimed Walker, mustering all his courage. "Will you allow me to speak a few words with you?"

Whilst uttering these words he endeavoured to take her hand, but she hastily withdrew it. He pointed to a chair, with an imploring glance, as if entreating her not by flight to deprive him of the opportunity of explaining himself.

Sarah hesitated an instant; but she felt she could not possibly refuse to listen. Her knees almost forsook her, and she sank upon the nearest chair, saying, in a whisper,—

"What do you wish to say?"

Her timidity gave him courage, and in a quiet, firm voice, he continued,—

"Miss Sarah, you surely cannot be ignorant that your image is deeply engraven upon my heart—that it has been so from the first moment that I saw you. I beg of you not to interrupt me; at least, allow me to express the feelings which have possessed my soul for years, and sometimes filled it with joyful hopes, sometimes with apprehensive doubts. I love you—love you with all the true and sincere ardour that a man is capable of; and upon your decision, whether favourable or otherwise, depends, perhaps, the happiness of all my future life. As regards myself, I shall be obliged, for some years to come, to follow the wild, adventurous life which I have chosen for my profession. But if fortune favours me ever so little—zeal and perseverance I will call to its aid—I shall soon obtain promotion, which will not only render me independent, in a pecuniary point of view, but permit of my settling in a town—perhaps at Sydney. Give me your hand, then;—trust me with the happiness, the peace of your future life, assured that no one would guard it more tenderly or devotedly than I will. I am the descendant of no noble family," he continued, in a hearty, open voice. "What I am, what I have, I owe only to my own exertions. If you will throw into the balance my heartfelt, ardent love for you, let me at least hope that, when I return to you, I may expect a friendly welcome. I have taken you by surprise," he added, before she could reply; "my bold offer has come upon you in too unexpected a manner. You want time; you wish to consider. Pray be not angry at the hasty manner in which I have spoken. You must remember that I was forced to do so by circumstances. To-morrow morning let me hear a 'Yes' or a 'No' from your eyes."

With this he rose hastily, took his cap, and was about to leave the room, when Sarah stopped him. She could not speak at first; her tongue refused its office, and only her outstretched arm, her entreating, anxious look, bade him stay; and, silent and trembling with expectation, he obeyed.

At last she recovered enough to be able to speak; and, as she regained motion and life, her self-possession and tranquillity returned, although her cheeks were deadly pale.

"Mr. Walker," she at length ejaculated, "you have, indeed

—you have surprised me by this unexpected offer; but—do not go away. Let us at once fully understand each other. You do me honour by this offer; you are, from general report, an honourable, upright man, and—my wants, as regards life, are modest enough—but——"

"Miss Sarah!"

"I can never be yours."

Walker did not reply. For several minutes he stood before her, gravely and in silence, with pale, trembling lips. At last he whispered—

"May I ask why?"

"It is my duty to tell you," replied Sarah. "You opened your heart to me in all sincerity, and I shall do the same to you. I love another."

"You love!" exclaimed Walker, in fearful emotion, "and he—but, no," he interrupted himself, "I have no right to ask you any more questions, and ought to thank you for having been so frank with me. May you be happy, Miss; may your husband be worthy of your choice! God is my witness that, although I had my own happiness in view when I asked for your hand, I would not purchase that happiness by causing you one single hour of sorrow."

"Mr. Walker," said Sarah, with emotion.

"It is past," replied the young man; "my dream is over. I once hoped to be allowed to protect your beloved head from all danger—to smooth your path through life. It is not destined to be so; and I think I know the happy man to whom the blissful and glorious lot has fallen. That you may never repent your choice is my most sincere wish; but," he added, in a low voice, trembling with emotion, "woe to the man, if he should deceive you!" He remained silent for a few minutes, and having gained a complete mastery over his feelings, he at last continued, in a perfectly tranquil, unimpassioned voice,—

"My duty compels me to spend this day here. This evening, or early to-morrow morning, I expect some of my men, who are gone in pursuit of a murderer, to return. I cannot avoid being near you during this time; but not a word, not a look from me, shall remind you of this hour Early to-morrow I shall depart: forget, at least until then, Miss Sarah, that in my heart I once indulged such bold hopes."

Sarah was about to make some reply, but he stretched out his hand to her, opened the door, closed it hastily, and almost uttered a cry of surprise, for at two paces from the door stood M'Donald. Before he could say a word the stranger bowed, and walked down the narrow passage which led to his room.

Walker remained fixed to the spot, and stared after M'Donald as if he had been an apparition. Had he just come into the house, or had *he* overheard his conversation with Sarah? Had *he* witnessed it? His blood flowed back to his heart, and he made a movement as if to follow the stranger; but he only entertained this thought an instant. The next minute he turned away, went out of the house, jumped on his horse, which had been waiting for him, and dashed into the bush.

M'Donald retired into his own room, shut the door after him, took a chair, and sat some minutes with his face buried in his hands. No sigh escaped from his breast, nor a word came from his lips; no motion of his body betrayed that he was alive. It was only when he heard the family returning home that he arose, strode hastily up and down the room with his arms folded over his breast, and, as if prompted by a sudden impulse, took his saddle-bag and packed it for a journey. He inspected his firearms, drew the old charges out of his pistols, and cleaned and loaded them afresh. Then, dressed as he was, he threw himself upon his bed, to follow his own thoughts quietly and undisturbedly until he should be called to join the family circle.

CHAPTER XI.

WALKER AND M'DONALD.

Meantime Lieutenant Walker had ridden into the bush at full speed. Whither, he scarcely knew himself, and only wished to collect his thoughts—to regain his coolness and self-possession, before returning, for the last time, to the family circle, in which he felt that he would leave his heart.

The thought of flight occurred to him—never, never again to see her whom he could not hope to call his own; but, on reflection, he acknowledged that such a course would not do. The stranger had been a witness to the refusal he received; he *must* have heard them speaking together, for the thin partition could not have prevented this—and to him he must show in what manner he left the field.

The quick ride exercised a wonderful influence upon Walker, who naturally possessed great firmness, and always met the blows of destiny with coolness. He had just turned his horse's head in the direction of the station, when the animal pricked its ears, and gave a loud and shrill neigh. Another horse, not far in the bush, answered, and immediately after one of his messengers returned on his jaded steed, through the rustling malley-bush, whilst the black fellow, who had been in the saddle since morning, gave a shout of joy at recognising his officer.

"Well, how did you get on? Have you discovered him?" exclaimed Walker, quickly turning his horse round.

"Kuyunko has!" the black replied, in a gloomy voice.

"Then, this new hut-keeper was really the murderer?"

The black simply nodded with his head.

"You followed his track?"

"Step by step. New boots make deep tracks."

"And you found?"

"Kuyunko dead—white man away—but blood in his track. Kuyunko fired.

"Kuyunko dead?" exclaimed the officer, with dismay; "but you followed the track?"

"Certainly, as far as the river. Much blood there—swam over; found blood on the other side, but not farther—must lie at the bottom. Officer must go with us now. Black police will seek the body; perhaps he is worth gold."

"You are right," said Walker, evidently disturbed, for he had scarcely heard the last words. "We must know who the murderer was; perhaps there is a price set upon his head. Has nobody *seen* him?" he suddenly asked, as if a new thought had struck him.

"No—not seen," was the reply.

"Have you no idea who it can be?"

"Red John," replied the black, coolly, and without moving a feature.

Walker stopped his horse so suddenly that it reared high in the air.

"Red John!" he exclaimed, scarcely noticing the prancing and leaping charger under him: "but how do you know that, if you have not seen him?—Was Kuyunko still alive?"

"No—dead; but Red John's boots stood by the first corpse, and black man needs no more."

The boots—true. Who knew the track?"

"Mahong!" replied he.

"Where is the sergeant?" the lieutenant asked, hastily.

"Yonder, by the river. Blacks look for the corpse.—Officer is to come and give further orders."

"How far is it from here?"

"Five—six miles! River makes great bend yonder."

"Come first to the house, then," said Walker. "Your horse wants rest, and I myself must speak with some one there before I can follow you."

He slowly turned his horse's head towards the station, the direction of which was already indicated by the cracking of the heavy stock-whips. Mahong followed, perfectly indifferent as to what further orders the lieutenant might give.

When they arrived at the fence, where the men were still busy separating the wild cattle, and marking those which were not branded, Walker reined in his animal. At the corner of the fence stood Mr. Powell, with his overseer, Mr. Bale. The ladies were already on their way home.

"Gentlemen," said Walker, "I am sorry to have to announce to you that your new hut-keeper has already left his post."

"The deuce he has!" exclaimed Bale. "Then I wish the fellow were hanged. I have just brought him a pound of tobacco."

"He must be caught, however, before being hanged," replied Walker, smiling. "I am afraid he is drowned."

"Drowned!—at the station?" said Bale, with a loud laugh. "Why, we are obliged to carry the water up to it in pails!"

"Nevertheless, he has been drowned in the river. But you ought to be glad to have got rid of him. He was one of the

most noted and dangerous bushrangers, and but a few days ago murdered a man."

"That is not bad!" exclaimed Mr. Powell; "and we may thank God we are delivered of this dangerous man in this manner."

"I always thought the fellow was not altogether right," said Bale; "but how in the world did you come on his track so soon?"

The officer did not reply immediately, for his attention was suddenly attracted to the two horses tied up against the malley-bush: he rode up to them, and examined them with the eyes of a judge.

"A capital pair of horses, this," he said, fixing his eyes on the grey. "Bred here?"

"The bay was," answered Bale, walking up to him, for every squatter is fond of having his horses praised. "The grey comes from the south."

"Does the animal belong to you?"

"Yes—a present from Mr. Powell. Mr. M'Donald brought him from the settlements."

"Mr. M'Donald!—Indeed. There is an "R. L." on the haunch, isn't there?"

"Yes; but I do not know the brand: it does not belong to any person in these parts."

"I once had a horse very much like this animal," said Walker, still looking at it. "It was shot under me by a bushranger, and I have not had a better one since. You do not know, perhaps, how much Mr. M'Donald paid for him?"

"Fifteen pounds, including saddle and bridle, he says."

"Fifteen pounds!" exclaimed the officer, quickly turning round.

"Well, it is not so *very* cheap," replied the overseer, "and in my opinion a very fair price."

"But how very pale you look to-day, Mr. Walker!" said Mr. Powell, interrupting the conversation, and laying his hand on the officer's knee. "I did not notice it so much before. Are you unwell?"

"Quite well, thank you," replied Walker, whose cheeks assumed some colour at this question. In fact, he wanted air, and almost unconsciously he touched his horse's flanks with his sharp spurs. The animal became restive, and required

his attention for a few moments; when he had quieted it, he dismounted, threw the bridle over its neck, and was going to lead it into the enclosure. Bale, however, would not suffer him to do this, but took the horse by the bridle and said:

"You will not want it again this evening?"

"No, but early to-morrow morning."

"Very well; then I will take care of the animal. But, the deuce! if what you say about the hut-keeper be correct, I must ride out this very evening."

"You need not be uneasy," said Walker. "There is no necessity for your doing so this evening. My men will keep watch. It will be time enough to-morrow morning."

"But how did you come on the track: how has all this happened?" asked Mr. Powell.

"I cannot exactly tell you that myself," replied Walker, evasively. "The information I have from my messenger is not very explicit; but to-morrow morning you shall know all the details. It will be best, however, not to say anything of the matter to the ladies to-day."

"The danger, thanks to your timely aid, is past," said Mr. Powell; "and I myself think it will be best not to mention anything about it, until we have full details of the affair. But come, our work is done, and we will return to the house."

Taking Walker by the arm, Mr. Powell accompanied him along the fence, when the black messenger met them, probably to receive further instructions from his superior. As soon as the latter saw him, he left Mr. Powell, who slowly continued his way to the house, whispered a few words into his ear, which the black answered with a nod, and Walker then followed his host.

Walker was once more perfectly collected. But as he stepped over the threshold, where all his hopes and dreams had been destroyed, he felt as if he could scarcely master the fearful emotions which had taken possession of his soul. Although he forced his features into their wonted calmness, he looked deadly pale, and his heart beat almost audibly.

It was twilight, but his altered appearance did not escape the sagacity of Mrs. Powell; and as soon as he stepped into the room, she looked at him with astonishment, and said anxiously,—

"For God's sake tell me what has happened to you: are you ill, Mr. Walker?"

"You look like a corpse," said 'Lisbeth, who stood by the

window, engaged in earnest conversation with M'Donald, and who now advanced towards him. "Has anything happened?"

"Pray do not be uneasy on my account," replied the young man, laughing, at the same time making a violent effort to collect himself. "I am afraid I exerted myself a little too much last week, and I had a violent headache this afternoon. But it is quite well now, and to-morrow I hope to be as fresh and jovial as ever."

M'Donald fixed a long and searching look upon him, but cast down his eyes as they met those of the officer, and, with a sigh, he turned towards the window. The black soldier was just coming towards the house: he glanced at the stranger, and disappeared through the door.

"Mr. Walker has his head full of business," said Mr. Powell; "so you must make some allowance for him. When he has rested, he will feel more comfortable and be better. But come, Sarah, play us something until light and supper are brought in. Do you like music, Mr. Walker?"

"Very much," replied the young man; "it is one of the pleasures that we poor bushmen are deprived of almost the whole year, and we enjoy it the more when an opportunity offers."

"It is a painful, rather than a pleasurable feeling," observed M'Donald.

"Then you do not like music?" asked Mrs. Powell, with an expression of surprise.

"Do not misconstrue my meaning," said M'Donald. "Perhaps no one likes music better than I do. It is a pleasure that has long been denied me; and when, after a dreary interval, I am greeted with it, my whole youth lies before me, as in a smiling spring, and my heart seems as if it must burst with sadness and bliss."

Whilst M'Donald was thus speaking, Walker looked sternly at him. When Sarah, without replying, sat down to the piano, and played national Scotch tunes, he went to the nearest window and took up a book, of which he mechanically turned over the leaves while he was listening to the soft beloved tones.

It was far too dark to read; nevertheless, the book soon attracted his attention. It was the copy of "Lalla Rookh," and his finger accidentally touched the hole made by the

bullet, which he carefully and curiously examined. It almost made him forget the music.

"Play something more cheerful," said Mrs. Powell to her daughter. "Your 'Home, sweet home,' awakens in all our hearts too many sad recollections; just listen,—how still everything is in the room!"

"You will spoil your eyes, Mr. Walker," said Ned, the youngest boy, who was standing by the window near the lieutenant. "When I read of an evening, mother always tells me not to do so."

"I am not reading," said Walker, as Sarah commenced another and more lively tune; "my attention has only been absorbed by the book because there is a place upon it where a bullet has struck it. Have the bushrangers ever fired into your room, Mr. Powell?"

"The book belongs to Mr. M'Donald," exclaimed 'Lisbeth. "His pistol went off as he was riding on horseback, and, fortunately, into the saddle-bag."

"In which he carried books?" asked the lieutenant, quickly.

"Yes; was not that fortunate?" answered the young girl, with a laugh.

Sarah touched the keys more rapidly, and played one of those old Scotch tunes of wonderful richness of melody.

"The pistol, fortunately, had a small charge," said Walker, putting down the book, "or the bullet would have penetrated further. After all, our life often hangs by a single hair; and it is well for us that we cannot lift the veil from the future."

The servants, who now entered the room to lay the cloth, interrupted the conversation and the music. Lights were brought in, although twilight had not faded; and the family, with the two guests, sat round the well-spread table.

The conversation turned upon indifferent topics, and George, who arrived late, having been detained by the cattle just recovered, had a good deal to say to his father. Moreover, the catarrh had broken out at one of the out-stations. One of the shepherds had just arrived with the intelligence, and measures were to be taken to remedy it as soon as possible.

When the cloth had been removed, Mr. Powell sent his youngest son for Mr. Bale, as he wished to give him some orders. As the boy opened the door, one of the black soldiers stood before it, and said that he wanted to speak to his officer. Walker rose immediately, but returned in half a minute, and approached the two young ladies, who were standing near the piano, conversing with M'Donald.

M'Donald was in better spirits than usual. Even Mr. Powell, in spite of the many matters that occupied his thoughts, did not fail to notice this favourable change in his guest.

"Well, have you caught him?" he asked, drawing nearer to Walker.

"Whom, father?" asked 'Lisbeth. "Has anything happened?"

"Happened!" repeated Mr. Powell, laughing. "Mr. Walker and his black fellows are taking away my hut-keeper. He does not trouble himself about what is to become of my cattle."

"Your hut-keeper?" said M'Donald, unable to conceal the interest he felt in the affair.

"Yes; in that disguise," replied Walker, smiling, "one of the most noted bushrangers sought to conceal himself. Luckily, my man came upon his track: it is the so-called 'Red John.' Did you ever hear of him, Mr. M'Donald?"

"Certainly. And you have caught him?"

"At least made him harmless."

"Good God, Mr. Powell!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell. "Was I not right, then, in saying we are surrounded by dangers? One of the most notorious bushrangers on the very station, and blacks enough to attack us any day they may think fit!"

"You must tell us all about it," said 'Lisbeth, going to Walker, and taking hold of his arm in a coaxing manner. "I am so fond of hearing such stories."

"Then," replied the young officer, "I am heartily sorry that I cannot satisfy your curiosity; I do not know the details myself. I only know the result, and I expect to have further intelligence to-morrow morning from my sergeant."

"Then you may be thankful too, Mr. M'Donald," said 'Lisbeth, turning to him, "that this fearful man can no

longer do any harm; for if you had ridden into the bush to-morrow morning, who knows but he might have lain in wait for you and shot you?"

"To-morrow morning!" said Sarah, with an expression of surprise. "Are you going away?"

"Only for a short time, Miss Sarah," he replied, while a slight blush covered his face. "If I really wish to find suitable pasture-grounds in the neighbourhood, I must think of looking for them, or else others will be beforehand with me."

Walker watched him narrowly whilst he was speaking, and again every drop of blood seemed to have left his cheeks. Did he envy his rival's happiness? His emotion, however, subsided suddenly, and he said—

"Mr. M'Donald is quite right; I myself know several squatters in the Adelaide District who have this country in view, and will not long delay putting their plans into execution."

"But we do not wish to hear that now," said 'Lisbeth; "tell us some wonderful bushranger story. You have long promised to do so, and, as you are going away, I shall lose my story."

"That you shall not," said Walker, laughing; "I made the promise, and I must keep it. Besides, very probably you have not yet heard of the last escape of the celebrated Jack Loudon. Perhaps Mr. M'Donald told you? He was, I believe, at Melbourne very lately, and, no doubt, knows all about it."

"I do," answered M'Donald, with a smile. "But tell the story; the ladies have not yet heard it, and I have no doubt that it will interest them."

"Escape?" said Mr. Powell; I think they caught him again."

"Yes, I think they did; but for all that he had made his escape, and left the colonies, it was thought, on board a small American schooner. This, however, turned out to be wrong. Perhaps the craft was wrecked upon the coast. I will not, however, anticipate."

"Why, Jack Loudon was transported—I know not wherefore: we seldom learn the causes here—we only have the carrying out of the law. I believe he was transported for life, or for so many years that it is pretty much the same.

Very different rumours are in circulation about him. Some make him out to be a sort of Rinaldo Rinaldini; having, they say, when he first took to the bush, shown great generosity and nobleness of mind, and kept the wild bands, which made him their chief, in strict order. Others declare that he has committed all sorts of cruelties and crimes; in short, it is difficult to make out the truth of the matter. I am inclined to believe, that, although he is so cunning, he is by no means one of the worst of criminals. At any rate, he deserved punishment, or else he would not have been transported. Having made his escape, and having been again captured, from venturing in the boldest and most foolish manner among his enemies at Melbourne, he was on the last occasion put in irons, and sent to Van Diemen's Land.

"Clothed in yellow and grey, the uniform of the worst class of convicts, he worked with his companions in misfortune, in heavy chains, on the wharves of Eagle Hawk's Neck —a small peninsula, whence escape was before considered impossible. The narrow piece of land, only a few hundred paces in breadth, which connects this place with the rest of the island, is not only guarded by armed soldiers, but also by some large and fierce dogs. Escape was considered impossible, whilst the sea at that place swarms with sharks; and every white man who attempted to swim over this narrow arm was sure to fall a prey to these hyænas of the deep. One stormy night, when the wind had lashed the sea into foam, and the guards were not inclined to be vigilant, Jack Loudon made his escape. The wind was favourable, as it blew directly towards him from the tongue of land where the dogs were chained, so that they could not scent him beforehand. He managed to free himself from his irons, and he reached without accident the ragged bushy hill which descends towards the dogs in a declivity. The sentry at the top, who had retreated into the box, did not perceive him, but the lamps, which were burning brightly round the dog-kennels, must have shown him as soon as he ventured off the descent, and betrayed him to the sentinel at the bottom. This, however, did not daunt him. The dogs were lying in their casks, only one on the left side was awake, and growling in the rain.

"It appears that he was in the meantime missed by the keepers, and some of them went to give the alarm to the

sentries. Perhaps he heard their voices, or feared pursuit; but before the last dog had returned into his cask, he ran down the steep. The sentry at the bottom was not asleep, as the fugitive perhaps hoped; and he had indeed seen him gliding down the rocks. Luckily for him he did not give the alarm immediately, but took a steady aim at him and fired—his gun missed. He immediately shouted to the dogs; but, at that moment, the fugitive had reached the nearest cask; he rushed past it just as the dog heard his steps, and came out barking furiously. The man would have been lost if the nearest dog had not got entangled in its chain as it rushed out. The other sentry, aroused by this tumult, fired at him, but missed, and in a few seconds he had disappeared in the darkness.

"The convict had even then to pass several posts and run the gauntlet with various dangers. How he managed to escape them all is not known. In short, he got off, found his way to Melbourne, and lay there concealed for some time. Driven at last to extremity, he took to the bush; other escaped convicts joined him; and as the magistrates could not muster forces enough to capture them, we were sent from Sydney."

"And where was he caught?" asked 'Lisbeth, who had listened to the tale with the greatest attention.

"I cannot tell you, miss," replied Walker. "The second lieutenant, Willman, succeeded in cutting him off from the bush, and driving him back towards the settlements: I followed other members of the band. He is said to have been concealed in the swamps, and to have fallen into the hands of the police, dangerously wounded. He will probably, unless something worse awaits him, be sent to Norfolk Island, and have to work in heavy chains. From that place escape is totally impossible."

"And you captured all the rest of the band?" asked George, who seemed to take a lively interest in the recital.

"Yes, almost all. There are only a few at large still. I scarcely think we shall ever see them again; they have no doubt perished in the Australian bush, or by the hands of the blacks."

"Yes, but how do you manage," asked 'Lisbeth, "when alone you meet with one of these fearful men in the bush?

In case he should not surrender at once, is not your life in danger?"

"Yes, very frequently, miss," replied the officer, gravely. "It is our duty to do our best to apprehend the culprit when we have once discovered him; and he, driven to extremity, often risks his life to save his liberty. They do not care much about a murder, more or less, and their punishment can scarcely be made more severe. Catching them is not generally so difficult as keeping them. The worst thing of all is to take a prisoner along with you."

"And how do you manage that?" 'Lisbeth inquired.

"I will tell you," said Walker. "If you take an interest in the process, I can explain it easily."

Saying these words, he took from his breast pocket a strong double-iron ring, provided with a lock, and held it out towards the young lady.

"Look!" he said, as 'Lisbeth, who did not know the meaning of the instrument, glanced at it shyly; "these are the so-called 'handcuffs,' or 'darbies;' they are placed round the wrist of the prisoner—many have been in these—in this manner. Allow me to show you for a minute."

"No, not on any account!" exclaimed 'Lisbeth, starting back with a shudder. "I should not sleep the whole night if I once felt the iron round my hands!"

"Are you afraid of them?" said Walker, laughing; "I am sure you are no bushranger. Mr. M'Donald, will you show the young lady how it is done? and you will all agree that it is a very simple and excellent instrument. I hope Miss 'Lisbeth will not be afraid of seeing the irons on another person."

As he said this, he took M'Donald's right hand, and the latter quietly surrendered it to him. It almost seemed as if a smile played upon the police-officer's lips.

"You see, ladies," said Walker, holding M'Donald's hand, round which he had placed the ring, towards them, "this is the way the thing is done. And now," he added, pressing the lock, which fastened with a loud crack, "the prisoner cannot use his arms to defend himself, and would find it very awkward to run away."

"Mr. M'Donald is a prisoner," said 'Lisbeth, laughing.

"My prisoner, IN THE NAME OF THE QUEEN!" Walker

said, suddenly, gravely and solemnly placing his hand upon M'Donald's shoulder.

M'Donald stirred not, but boldly confronted his antagonist. Not a muscle of his body moved, only his face had become as pale as marble.

"A patient prisoner, at least," said Sarah, who, without knowing why, felt an indescribable anguish in her heart. "Oh, pray take those irons away; the sight of them makes me shudder!"

She stepped forward, as if she were herself about to remove the fetters.

"Jack Loudon," said Walker, with a loud voice, his eyes darting fire, and with outstretched hand pointing at the prisoner, "*alias* Murphy, *alias* Bidol, *alias* M'Donald, the outlawed bushranger of Van Diemen's Land, the fugitive from Eagle Hawk's Neck, the captain of the band just scattered in the Hindmarsh swamp, stands before you! Do you still wish me to take off his fetters?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sarah, whilst the rest seemed to have lost the power of speech and motion at the fearful discovery. "M'Donald, speak—defend yourself—repudiate this falsehood!"

Walker started back, as if struck by a bullet, and became paler than his prisoner. M'Donald spoke not a word. As he had stretched out his arms to receive the fetters, so he stood, still and motionless. His eye caught Sarah's; she met his glance, looked at him for a minute, stretched out her arms towards him, and, with a loud cry, fell senseless upon the ground.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRISONER.

M'Donald's arrest produced dismay and confusion in Mr Powell's quiet family circle. If an apparition had appeared before them out of the ground, they could not have been more frightened than they were at the discovery of the real character of that man who had gained a place in all their affections.

Sarah's fainting fit drew the attention of the family to-

wards her; and M'Donald himself, on seeing the poor girl fall to the ground, made an unconscious movement, as if anxious to hasten to her assistance; but he quickly collected himself, let his arms fall, and said to Walker, in a low voice—

"Take me away!"

This, however, was easier said than done; and Walker, alarmed by Sarah's last words, scarcely knew how to act: he was sorely puzzled what to do with the prisoner. While standing irresolute, Mr. Bale, who had been a frightened spectator of this scene, walked up to him, and, laying his broad hand upon his shoulder, said to him, in an earnest tone of voice—

"Mr. Walker, I—I do not know whether you have a right to apprehend this man here. It is possible—nay, likely—that you have a warrant, without which you would not venture to lay hands upon an Englishman under the hospitable roof of an Australian squatter; but I think we are also entitled to ask what proofs you possess. Mr. M'Donald—zounds, man! at least tell us yourself whether you are the person he takes you to be, and if what he states be correct! Should it be nothing more than a mere suspicion, I'll be hanged if he shall take you away in that fashion, like a common criminal, with his blacks! You behaved like a man the other day, and perhaps saved my life. You even delivered this young lady, for whom we would all willingly lay down our lives, out of the hands of those worthless blacks; and I think these grounds are quite sufficient to justify our taking your part."

"Stop, sir!" said Walker, whom these words recalled to himself, and he boldly and sternly advanced towards the honest stock-keeper. "I am engaged in the service of Her Majesty, to apprehend, wherever I can find them, the bush-rangers who infest the land; and I have the warrant against Jack Loudon, *alias* M'Donald. He may deny that he is the man; and I shall produce the proofs—at least, such proofs as fully empower me to take him away, and give him up to the courts of justice, which may then decide whether I have exceeded my duty and deserve punishment. To them I will submit; but I shall resist by force any violent interference with my proceedings. The consequences be upon the heads of any who venture to obstruct me in the execution of my duty."

M'Donald appeared to be about to speak; but, although he

opened his lips, not a sound escaped. His eyes were anxiously rivetted upon Sarah, who remained in a senseless state.

"Oh, speak, M'Donald!" said Mr. Powell, leaving his daughter, and seizing the fettered hands of the unfortunate man. "Free us from this torture and anxiety. You know how dear you are to us all; you know how much we owe to you, and that we cannot, will not, believe that you, for whom I should have pledged my wealth, my honour, can be a criminal! I will not credit that you are one of those unfortunate men who mark their path through the bush by plunder and murder!"

"Mr. Powell!" exclaimed M'Donald, as if overcome by these earnest words, "I thank you—thank you from the bottom of my heart for your confidence in me. Preserve that confidence, and be assured that I am no criminal."

"That's what I thought!" exclaimed Bale, in triumph; "and now, Mr. Police-officer, the proofs!"

"Do you require them, Mr. Powell?" inquired Walker, "and would you refuse to give him up unless they were produced?"

"I would, at least, spare him this shame," said he, pointing at the handcuffs, "by becoming bail for him, and accompanying you to town. But I am curious to know how you have so suddenly become certain of the identity of this gentleman and the bushranger, since you had no notion of it this morning. In that case, you would not have sent all your men away."

"I can explain that in a few words," replied Walker, narrowly watching his prisoner. "You are perfectly correct in saying that I had no notion this morning who this pretended M'Donald was. The information that the hut-keeper (whom M'Donald confessed to be an acquaintance of his, and of whom he has spoken favourably) was a most dangerous bushranger, first excited my suspicions. As I returned home, with the firm intention of inquiring into the matter, I found——" he stopped suddenly. Sarah had recovered her senses, and he perceived that her eyes were firmly riveted upon him.

He wished to stop, but she beckoned with impatience for him to continue.

"You found?" Mr. Powell said.

"I found the grey charger on which M'Donald came to this station."

"Well, and what of that?" asked Bale, quickly. "Was that stolen too?"

"Yes, and no. The prisoner took him away unknown to the owner, and without his consent; but left what might have been considered the price of the animal near the house; certainly an unusual thing for a bushranger to do. The 15*l.*, too, afforded an additional proof. My suspicions were afterwards fully confirmed on my return to the house. I then recognised the fugitive, whom I had seen once before, although only hastily, and whom I did not know at first, on account of his beard. The bullet fired in the bush, and which comes out of my sergeant's carbine, was scarcely necessary to convince me. It is his passion for books which set the police again upon his tracks, as, to procure them, he even ventured with indescribable boldness into Melbourne. If further proofs are wanted," he continued, in a low voice, on seeing Sarah conceal her face in her hands, overwhelmed with sorrow, "I can furnish them from my blacks. Fearing these fellows, M'Donald has worn larger boots than he requires all the time we have been here. My man managed to procure those which he wore before, and his opinion only confirms the certainty of the accusation. Now, ask him, and let him deny, if he can, that he is the man known in Van Diemen's Land under the name of Jack Loudon, and who afterwards made his escape."

M'Donald had listened to the speaker motionless, and without interrupting him by a single word. Now, when the eyes of all were directed towards him, and as all were looking in mute dismay at the pale, guilty features, he said suddenly, in a firm, calm voice,—

"I *am* Jack Loudon—at least, in the sense which Lieutenant Walker means—although my real name is M'Donald."

"Gracious God!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, striking his hands together, while the honest stock-keeper could not suppress an oath, and then turned affrighted towards the ladies.

"Nevertheless, I am not guilty. I am not the criminal you take me to be," exclaimed the unfortunate man. "Transported, and guiltless—strange, incredible as it may sound—still it is the truth I am telling you. But that," he added, suddenly checking himself, and in almost an inaudible voice, "is all that I can tell you. As regards my apprehension, I certainly did hope Lieutenant Walker would have kept sacred

the peace of this house. Perhaps the time may come, although it will not be just yet, when I shall call him to account for his conduct in this respect."

"The accusation is hard, and I should gladly give the satisfaction," replied the young man, gloomily, "were it compatible with my duty. This duty, at the same time, compelled me to apprehend, as quickly as possible, the criminal denounced as dangerous by the State. Your departure, I heard, was fixed upon for to-morrow. All my men were away; what else could I do, if I did not wish to accomplish my purpose by violence and bloodshed, but have recourse to a stratagem? If you *are* innocent, you will be able to prove it legally. To furnish you with *that* opportunity is now my luty."

"Then take me away," said M'Donald, "and bring this scene, which is painful to all, to a close."

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, within whom a resolution had evidently been struggling for the last few minutes. "Mr. Walker, you will deem me, I hope, a loyal subject to the crown——"

"I never in my life doubted it, sir!" the young man quickly answered. "I never thought, for a single instant, that you had even the notion——"

"Stop—do not misconstrue my words," Mr. Powell interrupted him, with darkly-knit brows. "That I would not knowingly receive a bushranger into my house, no one can doubt; and I consider myself too much above such a suspicion to have the slightest intention of exonerating myself. I cannot tell how it is, but something makes me feel an interest in this unfortunate man. To me he has shown himself a man of honour; he has, besides, saved my dear child. We all have cause to be grateful to him, and my heart revolts at seeing him bound in fetters like a common criminal."

Mr. Powell was silent for an instant, as if overcome by his feelings, and all looked up to him full of expectation. At last he continued, in a low but firm voice,—

"I know it is your duty, as things stand, to take him to the nearest court. I do not know where you——"

"I shall take him to the nearest police-station, at the mouth of the Darling," replied Walker. "The chief of that

station will undertake to escort him to Van Diemen's Land, or Sydney, as he may think fit."

"Very well!" replied the old gentleman. "What if I now become bail, in any sum you may like to name, for the prisoner's safe arrival at the place of his destination, Sydney or Melbourne? If I become bail for him, and if his word of honour is sufficient to me, surely you will not refuse?"

"My good father!" said Sarah, who had approached him, as he uttered the last words, and placed her head upon his shoulder.

Walker bit his lips, and seemed surprised at the offer; Bale was delighted, and he nodded contentedly with his head, and rubbed his hands with great glee.

If he really *was* a bushranger, thought the stock-keeper, at least he had not stolen the horse, and had, moreover, behaved himself, during his sojourn among them, in a manner which had gained the hearts of all these rough sons of the bush. He felt assured of his innocence; and, if he surrendered to the judges, what else could be required of him? The prisoner, however, waived the apparent advantage offered to him.

"I thank you sincerely, deeply, noble-minded man," he exclaimed, before Walker could answer; "but I myself neither would nor could accept of it."

"Yourself?" exclaimed Mr. Powell, with surprise.

"I do not wish to be indebted in any way to the good-will of this gentleman," M'Donald continued, with his teeth firmly set. "Let him do his worst to gain the price set upon my head!"

"You hear, Mr. Powell, how matters stand," replied the lieutenant, with a shrug. "Under these circumstances you will understand it, if I do not wish to lose sight of this gentleman."

"How much is the head-money?" asked Bale, looking slyly at the officer.

Walker blushed deeply. The glance which he cast upon the overseer, and which the latter certainly met pretty indifferently, plainly showed that, at any other time, he would not have let such a question pass unnoticed. His duty, however, fixed him to this place, and he replied in a grave voice,—

"God is my witness that I would joyfully have paid the head-money out of my own pocket, if I could have spared you all this blow."

"And why did you choose such a moment to carry out your plans?" cried 'Lisbeth, with streaming eyes, and her cheeks flushed with anger. "I shall never forget your conduct."

"Peace!" said Mr. Powell, taking the arm of his child, "Mr. Walker has only done his duty. Whether he might have executed it at another place, and in a more pleasant manner, is a question he may settle with his own conscience. As matters now stand, and since M'Donald refuses my bail, nothing remains to be done but to finish what has been commenced."

"You will perhaps allow me, sir, to take one of your outhouses to-night?" said Walker. "I should not like to make your house a gaol. I expect to start at break of day."

"After what has occurred you may make it a gaol if you please. Your own room, or that before occupied by your prisoner, whichever seems safest, is at your disposal."

"And will you allow me to take a black servant?"

"Pray ask me no further questions," Mr. Powell observed, hastily. "Do as you think best. Her Majesty's servants have full power to act under my roof as the law requires. I now take my leave of you, Mr. Walker, as you will probably set off with your prisoner to-morrow morning before I am out of my bed."

The young man felt the bitterness which lay in these words, and bowed coldly.

"And you, M'Donald," said the old gentleman, turning to the prisoner, without, however, shaking his hand, "fare-you-well, and may God grant that you may clear yourself of the suspicion weighing upon you; if not, may God pardon you the sorrow you have brought upon my house!"

M'Donald started up with a quick and violent motion, but the fetters prevented any movement. He wished to speak, but his glance fell upon Sarah, who hid her face on her father's shoulders.

With a deep sigh he turned round to Walker, who understood his look, and, followed by the officer, hastily left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOBY.

On the morning when the black police unexpectedly arrived at the station on the Murray, Toby, the new hut-keeper of the Dry Swamp Station, was sitting before his hut, and, for want of tobacco, was sulkily chewing a twig which he had broken off a bush in the neighbourhood. The shepherd had just gone off with his flock, and the place was left to the care of this discontented individual.

"Hem!" he murmured at last, with an oath,—"here I am, in this accursed nest, dying of weariness. Hut-keeper, with twenty pounds per annum—a good interest for the hundred set upon my head. Not a pipe of tobacco, and with the prospect of being shrivelled up in this dry life and place, like a mushroom. If it were not to rest my sore feet and my weary limbs, I should play the very devil in watching their sheep, and spoil the wild dogs' sport. Queer country, this; the world turned upside down; where they make a regular bushranger a hut-keeper, the fox a guardian, and after all leave him nothing he could steal. Cursed country! nothing for a thousand miles one way or another. I must, somehow, manage to return to the coast, and get into a better country. If that rascally stock-keeper would only come with the tobacco—with tobacco I'll go anywhere. And Jack Loudon here too—a gentleman, as usual—on a damned good horse. Well, John can run. I hope at least the bloodhounds of the so-called 'justice' will not interfere with one here; and, by the devil's help, John will also get a good horse again, and a good coat upon his back. If I only get the horse, the rest will soon follow. Hallo! who comes here?" he exclaimed, on hearing the sound of hoofs. He rose to get his gun out of the hut, in case he might need it. On recognising through the gum-trees the form of the overseer, he stuck his hands into his pockets and went out to meet him.

"Well, Toby, hard at work?" said Bale, galloping up to him and pulling up short before him. "These hurdles must be mended, and the roof also would be no worse for a few sheets of bark. I think I told you this before; do you intend to follow the example of your predecessor?"

"I'll be hanged," replied the new hut-keeper, sulkily, "if I do a piece of work before I have some tobacco between my teeth. My throat is so dry that I can scarcely breathe."

The overseer laughed.

"Very well," he said, putting his hand into his pocket and throwing him the much-longed-for packet of tobacco; "if that's all, I have brought some. But now the machine is greased, I hope it will work."

"Think so," replied Toby, with satisfied mien. Without further ado he tore the paper, and as soon as he found a corner uncovered bit into the whole piece. "You'll be satisfied with me. Hang it! that's good!"

"How long have you been without tobacco?"

"How long?—it must be an eternity. I have lost all notion of time since. To-day a new year begins."

"Where is Hendricks?"

"Gone for a walk with the sheep."

"In what direction?"

"Oh, in what direction!—That way. I saw him last just where that tall pine-tree is standing."

The overseer had just turned his horse's head in the direction pointed out, when it occurred to him that he had something else to tell the hut-keeper.

"Hallo, Toby!" he shouted to him, as the latter was returning into the hut to fetch a pipe in order to derive double pleasure from his long-denied refreshment.

"Mister?" said he, leisurely turning his head.

"The dray will very likely come to-morrow morning. It is possible the governor may want a few more sheep, unless he should kill at the station."

"Why, bless me! The whole load can't be eaten up yet?" Toby exclaimed, with astonishment.

"It won't last long. We have numerous visitors, a swarm of the black police is quartered at the station. Well, don't keep the man too long to-morrow morning with the bullocks." Without waiting for a reply, the overseer set spurs to his horse and soon disappeared among the bushes, leaving his new hut-keeper in by no means a joyful surprise. He even forgot his pipe at this unwelcome news, and stared after the horseman as long as he could see him.

"The devil!" he muttered; "this is a pretty business! The bloodhounds here! My only hope now lies in the bush. Well! well! well! There will be the devil to pay! A hut-

keeper in the bush, with a pound of tobacco as an earnest, and the black brutes perhaps upon my tracks the very next hour. Now Jack Loudon will be awfully pleased at this. 'Johnny, Johnny! a desperate business this; and if you get out of the scrape this time, I shall have all possible respect for you!' But after all," he added, with a toss of his head, "who knows whether they will come so far. We must not shout before we are hurt, and with time comes counsel. I shall not go away before they ferret me out and force me to take to my heels: in this soft soil I should have them all behind me in a line. A blind man could feel these tracks in the sand with a stick. But we'll keep a sharper look out at any rate; and if they do come, curse them," he added, with a dark expression, "they will discover that they have not chased Red John for three years in the bush, and forced him to fraternise with these blacks, without teaching him some of their cunning. Besides, my gun will be of service; and as long as I have powder and ball, I shall easily manage to keep them off."

With these words he went into the hut, quietly cut sufficient tobacco for a pipe, filled it, and, whilst puffing away with evident pleasure, took his gun. He carefully drew out the old charge, cleaned the barrels, loaded afresh, and slung the weapon across his shoulders, and then set about the work he had to do at the hurdles. Should the dray come in the morning, he would at least learn from the driver what the blacks were about. Perhaps, too, they had gone away, and in that case he had nothing to fear.

He had not finished his work at the hurdles until the afternoon, and he then set about repairing the roof. For the work in hand he needed a few large sheets of bark, and armed with a small hatchet, which he found sticking in one of the posts, he walked slowly to an old lagoon, on the border of which stood several large gum-trees.

As a necessary precaution, he took his gun with him, and placed it behind one of the trees, a little out of sight, in case the overseer should return that way, after which he cut and stripped off the necessary sheets of bark with a practised hand. He was so deeply engaged in his work, that he actually for a moment forgot the circumstances in which he was placed. Whilst occupied in piling up the bark, he suddenly heard a voice close by, calling him by his bush name, "Red John."

He turned round as if stung by an adder, and he certainly had sufficient cause to be frightened. Scarcely fifteen paces from him, with his gun levelled at him, though nodding to him in a very friendly manner, stood a black, in the dreaded uniform of the bush police. He called out to him with a laugh, on seeing his dismay,

"How do you do, Red John, hein? butsheri?—yabou butsheri!—yes—remain together now—going to great smoke (*i.e.* large town). Stop! not stir!" he exclaimed, in a threatening manner, as the so-called "Toby," made an almost involuntary movement to the place where his gun was standing—"Kuyunko has bullet and much powder in it—puff! goes off, and makes hole in poor Red John!"

John was ready to burst with rage at being caught in this manner. He felt ashamed that the old cunning bushranger had allowed himself to be thus outwitted by a soldier of the police. However, there was nothing to be done by violence for the moment; he knew very well that if he was only wounded by a shot, he must be lost in the bush. Besides, more of them might be near at hand, and they would be the sooner attracted by the report of the gun. A hasty glance, however, which he cast at the tree behind which his gun was concealed, convinced him that the black did not suspect he was armed, or else he would have crept up to him from that side and made sure of him. There was therefore one hope left, and man still clings to it to the very last moment with all his might. All he could do now was to oppose cunning by cunning, and he scowled with great coolness, although with no friendly look on the black:

"Hallo!—what's up now? Can a man not quietly do his work in the bush, without such a black blue-coated gallows-bird sneaking up and levelling his gun at him? Are we among bushrangers here, or on a peaceable station?"

"All very well, Red John, very well," said the black, laughing with intense satisfaction at the success of his stratagem: "must not run away, or—puff! Bullet quicker than boomerang.

"Oh, go to grass!" growled the white man. "What do you want, and why do you call me Red John? My name is Toby, and I am hut-keeper here."

"Butsheri!" said the black, still laughing. "All very well—Mr. Walker will be very glad."

"Walker—the devil," thought John. "A pretty pickle you have got into." However, he did not let the black see how uneasy this name made him, but replied:

"*Who* will be glad?—Now, hang it, do take your precious gun away! Don't you see, you blind mole, that I can't escape you?" At the same time, he slowly hobbled, with his back turned upon the black, towards the tree, which was about five paces from him, and laid himself down at the root.

Kuyunko watched this manœuvre with great suspicion. He knew perfectly well, by the tracks which he had followed, that the white man was not lame, and it could be nothing but a stratagem on his part, to put him off his guard. But the black laughed at the idea that the white man thought him so stupid, and as the bare sand-hill behind the tree formed a steep ascent of about forty paces, the bushranger could not attempt to escape that way, without being all the time exposed to his fire, and so he quietly let him do as he liked. He only put his gun down from his shoulder, as he saw him sitting, and then walked up to him, but still with the utmost caution.

"Who will be glad, eh?" John asked, again turning round to him.

"Well, Mr. Walker, the lieutenant," said the black.

"*He?*" exclaimed John, with such well-acted joy, that even this cunning black felt perplexed. "Well, if *he* is there, then I have nothing to fear, my boy. Why, he wrote to me that he has my full pardon in his pocket. 'Pon my word, my good fellow, the news is worth a piece of tobacco."

"Tobacco!—Have you got any?" Kuyunko asked, greedily, without, however, venturing within reach of his captive, considering it much safer to keep him at a respectful distance with his gun still in hand.

"Well, I should think so," said the bushranger, laughing: "the overseer brought me a pound. Do you want any?"

The black hesitated a moment before answering. But his conscience was not so very scrupulous. What he could get out of the prisoner for himself was pure, unexpected gain; of course, he would not let him off on that account. "Good," he said; "but then Red John will go with Kuyunko to Lieutenant Walker—good man Lieutenant Walker—do him no harm."

"Yes, I know his kindness of disposition," thought John,

and then said aloud, feeling his pockets for his tobacco, with great calmness and apparent unconcern:

"Certainly, my boy, with the greatest pleasure. I shall be d——d glad to see your lieutenant again. But what's become of this tobacco? Are you *alone* here?"

"Quite alone," replied Kuyunko, laughing, and not a little proud to have outwitted the dangerous bushranger unassisted. "The others are all at the station."

"Ah—I think I put the tobacco into that bush, just behind you, Kuyunko;—you are treading upon it."

Kuyunko looked cautiously towards the place pointed out, without, however, turning his back upon John. It was only when he saw that the bushranger remained on the ground, leaning upon his elbow, that he turned his head to look for the tobacco. It was the work of a moment, yet enough for John to spring up, and before Kuyunko could raise his gun, or take aim, he jumped behind the tree. The black, not suspecting that John had a weapon concealed there, thought he only wished to get the tree between them, to run up the hill and escape into the bush. He therefore, with his gun to his shoulder, and without the least concern about his own safety, ran sideways towards the tree, wishing to get sight of the fugitive, when, suddenly, the latter jumped up close before him. The next instant the report of a gun re-echoed through the still forest, and Kuyunko, whose weapon slipped out of his grasp, stood motionless for a moment, staring at his assassin, then dropped his arms and fell dead to the ground.

Red John remained standing on the spot from which he had fired, reloading his gun.

"That's a *quietus* for him!" he muttered, according to his habit of speaking aloud when alone. "This rascal has his reward; but it won't be long before I have the whole pack upon my heels. Well, if the brute hadn't sneaked up like a cat, I should not have thought they could outwit me in this fashion. What's to be done now? Bah! Red John has not been chased these three years like a wild dog for nothing. I need not despair now, with perhaps four-and-twenty hours' start! We'll see which is cleverer, I or these black heathens, whom our Christian governor set upon the white man as he does his hounds after foxes. They have not caught Red John yet; and if they would only send up their men one

by one against me, I should soon put an end to all the precious police.—Ha! ha! But, let us set to work now, and I'll be hanged if I don't lead them by the nose until all is blue."

He listened cautiously for some time, trying to discover whether a new enemy was in pursuit, but all remained quiet; and this man, hardened in crime, set about, not concealing his deed—that, he knew, was impossible—but to endeavour to lead his pursuers astray; for he was aware that they would soon be upon his track. His sole object, therefore, was to place himself in security.

Having fired off the dead man's gun, he threw it down upon the ground beside him. After this, he took his own neckerchief off, and thoroughly saturated it in the blood of his victim. This neckerchief he placed upon a pretty large piece of bark, which he carried upon his shoulder, and then walked as quickly as he could towards the hut, in order to provide himself with provisions and whatever else he might find useful. Now and then he stopped and let a drop of blood fall to the ground. He did not stay long in the hut, where he might at any moment be surprised by fresh spies: he broke open Hendricks' chest, which stood in a corner, took out some money, a clasp knife, and a tinder-box, put the lid down again, and struck off in a straight direction towards the river.

At first he bent his flight towards the river as quickly as his feet could carry him, carefully avoiding all soft places in the ground, which would have betrayed his tracks too plainly. That this would not ensure his safety, and that the blacks would follow him as easily as upon a beaten road, he knew very well; but he must at least try to make them believe that he wanted to throw them off the track. This was part of his plan, and he let a drop of blood fall here and there. In a word, he acted the part of a wounded man, who, at the commencement of his flight, ran as fast as he could, and whose strength was gradually failing. He stood still several times, and even sat down, always leaving traces of blood, although light ones. He reached the valley covered with the tall gum-trees just at sunset, and walked over the last few hundred paces which separated him from the river with slow and heavy steps. He laid down once, although only

for a second, at the foot of a tree, and then sought a convenient place to swim across the river, which was tolerably deep at this part.

He chose a spot where the bank shelved on one side, but was steep on the other, and he used his sheet of bark as a canoe, to keep his gunpowder and blanket dry. Being an expert swimmer, he easily reached the opposite shore. Here he again endeavoured to leave signs, by which he hoped to throw the blacks off the scent. He stuck his fingers into the stiff clay soil, clung to the bank as if he had been vainly attempting to climb up, brought his knee up, slipped down again, and passed the neckerchief saturated with blood a few times over the spot; he also left the impression of his gun in the soft soil. Then he carefully washed his sheet of bark, packed the things he wanted upon it, and, pulling his small canoe after him, swam slowly down the stream. It was already dusk; but he knew very well that for the night he had nothing to fear from pursuit. His chief object was not to leave any traces that might again set them on his track.

His calculations had been excellent. His foes would naturally await the return of their messenger before taking any steps to secure him. By the time they learned his fate, and Hendricks, enraged at his loss, could lodge a complaint against him, he would have gained a start of four-and-twenty hours. Moreover, Hendricks could know nothing of the black murdered in the bush, even if he had heard the reports of the guns.

When the blacks found the corpse of their comrade, they, of course, easily followed the tracks of the fugitive, pointing with exultation at the blood which they thought came from some severe wound, as Kuyunko's gun had been discharged. They also discovered the traces of blood on the other side, as well as the other traces, left especially for their benefit. The sergeant at once gave up all hopes of securing the fugitive he had already made sure of, alive.

"My lads," said he to his men, "the rascal has been drowned, and our hundred pounds look very bad, unless we should happen to find his floating corpse caught in the tracks of some gum-tree. At this place he tried to get out, and slipped back twice; he must have bled like a pig. 'Sdeath! I would give a finger to catch the fellow alive."

The only thing to be done was to search for the corpse of

the murderer. The sergeant, therefore, immediately sent one of his men, Mahong, to give the lieutenant notice of the state of affairs; and the blacks stripped to dive for their prey under the water.

Few wild tribes are such practised swimmers, especially divers, as the blacks on the shores of the Murray. Thrown to a great extent upon the resources of the river, they often walk for a considerable distance along the bottom, armed with their wooden spears, and spear lobsters and fish, which are frequently found under the trees that have fallen into the river. Thus they remain for several minutes under the water, ascend to the surface for a short time to breathe a moment, and disappear again beneath the waves.

The sergeant could not, therefore, have desired better assistants. The course of the river a little farther down was obstructed by several large gum-trees which had fallen into it, and lay like lead at the bottom. But the blacks could not find in their slime-covered branches the least traces of the murderer, and night at last put a stop to their researches.

The sergeant had expected his lieutenant, and, as he did not arrive, he ordered his men to encamp for the night. With the first dawn of morning he broke up to return to the station, in order to report the partial success and partial failure of the expedition. He left two blacks by the river-side, to keep watch and make further researches, as he was unwilling to give up the search. The idea of the hundred pounds reward was a *great incitement* to exertion.

CHAPTER XIV.

KARURRU.

At break of day, Walker, accompanied by his prisoner and Mahong, had, as Mr. Powell desired, quitted the station. M'Donald seemed to submit to his fate with the greatest resignation. He rode the horse he had taken in exchange for his own. Walker had consigned his saddle-bag and fire-arms to the care of the black soldier. His hands were still fettered, and a strong rope, tied to his horse's bridle and

passed round the pommel of Walker's saddle, regulated the pace of his horse, and rendered every attempt at flight impossible; besides, what security could he have found in the bush unarmed, and with his hands bound!

The station was still and quiet when they left. One of the hut-keepers brought four horses out of a small paddock and commenced saddling them: M'Donald's grey was among the number.

Walker approached the man, who was gazing with astonishment and curiosity at the prisoner, and said—

"What do you want with these horses, my man, at so early an hour?"

"Master, sir," replied the man—"master, and Master George, and Master Ned, with Mr. Bale, are going into the bush to drive in horses for the Adelaide market."

"Oh, indeed! By-the-bye, my man, if any of my fellows should pass this way, tell them they will find me at the next bend of the river. You understand me?

"Ay, ay, sir; but—*this* is the way to Adelaide."

"I am not going to Adelaide. Don't forget the next bend."

"I shall not forget."

M'Donald cast an anxious glance at the hospitable house. He almost thought he saw one of the curtains moving,—but perhaps he was mistaken; and, with a deep sigh, he turned his head, and, forgetful of his fetters, pressed the flanks of his horse, which bounded forward. The rope checked it, and, chafing under the restraint, the animal pranced about with its master.

"Not so quick, sir," said Walker, quietly; "we must accustom our horses to a gentle pace. When we have gone some distance, we may, perhaps, give them the reins."

"It is your right to order," gloomily replied the captive, riding in silence by the side of his keeper along the pretty, broad, and sandy road. Mahong followed closely, in obedience to his master's orders, with strict instructions to fire at the prisoner if he made the slightest attempt to escape. Walker informed M'Donald of this order as soon as they had started.

When they reached the end of the station, where the bush commenced, Walker stopped the horses, turned round, and looked for a minute at the cluster of houses which lay peacefully in the light of the rising sun. Not a human being was

to be seen, except the servant saddling the horses. On the bare sand-hill behind the buildings Nguyulloman sat, stirring his fire, which sent forth a thick black smoke, rising perpendicularly into the clear morning atmosphere.

"Forward!" said Walker, turning his horse, and M'Donald obeyed the order. "It would have been better for both of us had we never seen the place!"

M'Donald turned round quickly and cast an inquiring glance at Walker; but the young man let his head droop upon his breast, and gazed abstractedly upon the ground. He put his horse into a brisk trot; the prisoner followed, and they went at this pace until they had almost reached the bend previously mentioned. Some horsemen were seen advancing in an opposite direction, and soon after the sergeant arrived, followed by six or eight of his men. On perceiving his lieutenant, Walker stopped in the middle of the road to wait for him.

"Mr. Lieutenant," said the old soldier, with a military salute, "I have to report to you that—— The devil!" he exclaimed, forgetting discipline and the service in his astonishment at seeing the stranger in irons; "Mr. M'Donald with her Majesty's handcuffs!"

The lieutenant remained silent for an instant, but a slight smile of triumph played upon his features, and, pointing to the prisoner, he said, with mock politeness—

"Cullock, I have the pleasure of introducing you to Mr. Jack Loudon."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the sergeant, whilst the blacks, who were still too far in the rear to catch the words, whispered among themselves on recognising the stranger from the station. "Well, the expedition, after all, has not been in vain, and we have caught the chief bird!"

"Do you not wish to present me to your other men?" said M'Donald, in a voice trembling with anger.

"It is not necessary at present," Walker quietly replied, "as I shall escort you myself to the nearest station; besides, Mahong, I see, has already done that."

Mahong had, indeed, joined his comrades for the purpose of making them acquainted with the importance of their capture; and the black fellows, rolling their large white eyes about, advanced to examine the white man more closely who had ventured so boldly into the midst of them after having so long escaped their vigilance.

"Get back!" shouted their officer, in anger. "Sergeant, keep your troop in order; the fellows know as much of discipline as a flock of sheep."

"They are so much the better upon a track," said the sergeant, laughing; "and you should have seen how they followed the traces of Red John—one with his nose on the ground, like a hound after the scent of a fox, and the others at his heels, with the quickness of lightning. I cannot blame them for their curiosity to see the gentleman; and who knows whether the scrutiny may not be useful, for the gentleman does not look as if he were easy to keep?"

M'Donald bit his lip, but did not reply; and Walker, who wished to put a stop to this conversation, spurred his horse, and thus gave the signal for starting. The sergeant rode on his right side, while M'Donald was at his left, and the blacks followed about twenty paces in the rear. The sergeant now made a short report with reference to the fruitless search, and declared his conviction that the *wounded* bushranger had found a grave in the Murray, and was sticking fast in the branches of one of the numerous gum-trees in the bed of the river. The blacks were certainly of a different opinion, because they had found no traces at the *bottom* of of the river. But their leader concluded that the strong current might have swept these away, and he had no reason to believe that a renewed search would lead to any good results. "Besides," he added, "it must have rained higher up the river during the night, as it increased three inches in depth, and in some places overflowed its banks."

"The more reason, then, to continue our search as soon as possible," replied the officer, riding towards the river, which was scarcely more than twenty paces distant from the path. "It appears to me that the water begins to look muddy. Therefore, avail yourselves of the present opportunity; search the other shore as far as the station, and, if you do not find anything, follow me this evening with your men. Mahong may go with you; he is one of the most expert; and I shall take one of the others with me as an escort. I shall remain at the next station until you bring me some intelligence. At any rate, if the water should rise rapidly, we shall be compelled to hasten to the police-station on the higher land."

The sergeant did not seem much inclined to renew the

search; but the order was given, and he was bound to obey. He kept his officer company for four or five miles, until they reached the place where Red John had crossed over; he then turned to the right with his men, and struck into the low swampy land of the bush, formed southward by a bend of the river. The lieutenant, attended by one of his men, went with his prisoner in the direction of the malley hills. The soil consisted of hard red sand, scantily covered with wild oats and grass, and the horses went at a brisk pace.

They might have been riding thus for an hour, side by side, each occupied with his own thoughts, when a black was seen running across the path before them, and quickly disappearing among some tea-shrubs.

Walker pulled up suddenly, and the black riding behind him rose high in his stirrups, to watch the dark form as far as he could. Upon M'Donald this apparition made a strong impression. He fancied that, in the hairy upper body of the black, he recognised Kakurru.

When they arrived at the spot, where the black had crossed the path at one bound, they stopped; Walker's attendant dismounted, and, placing his head upon the ground, examined the track.

"That's of no use, my man," said his officer, laughing. "No doubt we came unexpectedly upon some black belonging to one of the neighbouring tribes, and he scampered so fast to get out of our way. All these fellows have a bad conscience, and take to their heels as soon as they catch sight of our uniform."

The black did not seem to understand two words of his lieutenant's speech, but kept carefully examining the track. It was only when his officer had told him repeatedly to proceed, and not to trouble himself further about the matter, that he could be induced to desist. When he overtook the lieutenant, the latter wished to learn what he had discovered; but the poor devil did not understand a word of English, and chattered in his own dialect a long tale of which Walker, on his part, could not make out a syllable.

"A pretty business this!" he muttered to himself. "The sergeant has given me a man to whom I cannot even make myself understood."

"His communication is not of any consequence," said M'Donald, who had listened to the black with the greatest

attention. "He only says he does not know the track, and believes the man belongs to another tribe."

"You speak the language of these people?" said Walker, quickly, with great astonishment.

"At any rate, I *understand* most of what they say."

"Very well," replied Walker, laughing. "Then, perhaps you will be so kind as to tell him to light a fire at the next turn in the river to which we come, that we may get a cup of tea. We have none of us had breakfast yet."

M'Donald translated this order to the black. The latter looked inquiringly at his officer, as if to receive confirmation, and, on seeing him nodding assent, he hastened forward to execute the same. The two horsemen followed the scarcely-visible track left by a bullock-dray in the sand. Walker was silent, and lost in thought; but M'Donald's attention was excited to the utmost, and he moved along in almost breathless expectation. He had again observed the same black form close by the road-side, about a hundred paces in advance; and it was evident they were observed and followed by some native tribe. Whatever might be their intention, *he* must be a gainer. Death itself would have been more welcome to him than the prospect of a new imprisonment, more frightful than any he had before suffered. If he had seen aright, and if the strange visitant really was Kakurru, he had nothing to fear for his own safety; for that man was deeply indebted to him, and he hated the native police like death. With these impressions, he began fidgeting his hands, and this movement first attracted the attention of the officer to him.

"Do the handcuffs hurt you?" he asked, with greater kindness than M'Donald had expected, for he looked at his keeper with an expression of astonishment. The latter, however, recollecting, as it were, their mutual position, added in a much rougher manner,—"Yes, they are an unpleasant thing to wear, these darbies; but I cannot take them off."

M'Donald did not reply; but, placing his hands upon the pommel of his saddle, he looked silently and gloomily before him. The officer suddenly stopped the horses, looked narrowly at his prisoner, and observed that he was watching him.

"Answer me one question, M'Donald," he said—"a ques-

tion which I do not ask you as a lieutenant of the police, but as a man to a man."

"And what is that?" replied M'Donald, as a slight and bitter smile played about his lips.

"Simply this. Did you really intend, if you had not been discovered, to take a station here—to found a home—to——"

M'Donald scarcely paid any attention to what he said. His eyes were fixed with astonishment and surprise upon a dark form, no other than that of Kakurru, emerging from a wild salt-bush close behind the officer's horse, and swinging in the air one of those small Australian clubs, the so-called "waddy." Walker quickly followed the direction of his looks; but had scarcely turned his head, when the waddy, disappearing in the bush, came whirling the next instant, and striking the young officer upon the forehead, he fell senseless to the ground, as if hit by a bullet. With the rapidity of a kangaroo, the black rushed out and seized his weapon, and before M'Donald could quiet his horse, which had taken fright, he bent over the senseless body of the officer, and, with exultation, produced the key to the prisoner's handcuffs.

"Kakurru, you have come at the right time!" shouted M'Donald, joyfully; but the black, with a sign of his hand, advised him to be silent. He was not saved yet, as the soldier, who had gone on before them, might return at any moment. Moreover, the horse kept shying at the dark form of the black. M'Donald, laying his fettered hands on the pommel of his saddle, sprang to the ground, and held his arms, trembling with wild emotion, to the black. Three seconds after he was free.

"Now, then," said Kakurru, with a laugh: at the same time he bent over the prostrate body of the officer, and, seizing his waddy with a firmer grasp, exclaimed, "we had better make an end of him at once."

"Stop!" exclaimed M'Donald, interposing to prevent this deed. "No blood shall be shed save from necessity. Give me the handcuffs!"

A wild smile played on the countenance of the native.

"Also good," he said, perceiving the intention of M'Donald. "Turn the tables. Ha, ha, ha! how he will look when he recovers! Good! the white man may live; that is your

affair, Jacky. You may do what you like with him, but the other is mine."

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed M'Donald, as Kakurru stepped up to the officer's horse, and took the carbine.

"What am I going to do?" repeated the black, with flashing eyes; "kill the black spy! A curse upon the dogs who turn traitors to their own tribe, track them, and give them up to the white men. Oh! that Kakurru could kill them all with one bullet! You secure this one, I shall take care of the other!"

Before M'Donald could answer a word he had disappeared in the thicket.

M'Donald had scarcely time to secure the hands of the prostrate man, and the irons had but just closed, when Walker, who was merely stunned, opened his eyes, and made a motion, as if about to jump up.

"What is this?" he exclaimed, on feeling his hands secured. "Mahong, rescue! Mahong!"

"Lieutenant Walker," said M'Donald, who had meantime taken the pistols out of the holsters, and went up with them towards the young man, "you see fortune has changed. Our parts are reversed, and you are in my power. Little as I wish to hurt you, you will, however, compel me to do so, for at the first shout you utter I will blow out your brains, or, worse still, leave you in the bush, bound and helpless as you are. Submit, therefore, to necessity. Providence, through the assistance of a faithful black, has made me free, and I am determined to preserve my freedom better than I have hitherto done."

"Treason!" said the officer, gnashing his teeth. "Think of what you are doing, before you dare to lay hands on one of her Majesty's officers."

"It certainly is a fearful crime," replied M'Donald, with a smile; "but, considering what I have already to answer for, I do not think it will matter very much."

Walker did not reply, but the anxious look he cast in the direction the black had taken, plainly showed that he expected help. Suddenly the report of a gun was heard in that direction, and M'Donald, listening for awhile, ran quickly to the officer's horse, replaced the left pistol in the holster, keep-

ing the other in his hand, and vaulted into the saddle. At the same time, he unfastened the cord by which the horses were tied together.

"Your escape is hopeless!" exclaimed Walker, in triumph. "Your black accomplice is by this time bathed in his blood; and, with my men upon your tracks, you *cannot* get away."

M'Donald gave no answer, and only looked attentively in the direction whence the report had been heard. At the same time, his teeth were firmly set together, his cheeks deadly pale, and he was evidently struggling with some wild, desperate prompting of his heart. Suddenly a dark form became visible; hoofs were heard, and Kakurru galloped up, shouting wildly, and triumphantly swinging the short carbine over his head, while with the waddy in his left hand he urged the horse to a quicker gallop. When he reached the two men, he stopped short and pulled his horse up, which obeyed its mad rider, snorting and puffing. The sight he presented was fearful. His black form shone with fat freshly rubbed on, and was streaked with blood. Fat even trickled from his hand and beard, and his eyes sparkled with exultation.

Walker concealed his face in his hands with an expression of horror, and even M'Donald turned away with a shudder. Both knew too well the habits of these wild tribes not to perceive at once that he had slain his antagonist, and anointed himself with the fat of his kidneys. Thereby these unfortunate men fancy the strength of their vanquished enemy is added to their own; and this ointment is, moreover, the greatest and most honourable sign of victory.

"That is the consequence," at last said M'Donald, after a short pause, "of your miserable system of setting black against black. The hatred of these unfortunate tribes is daily increased: their thirst for blood and their desire of revenge, however useful they may be to you now and then, often produce terrible consequences."

"And what do you intend doing with me, now?" asked Walker, gloomily: "I am in your power—what are your plans?"

"You are free," M'Donald answered, quickly, "as soon as you have pledged me your word of honour to allow me eight-and-forty hours' start. Afterwards, you may pursue me in what way you like."

"Never will I make such a promise," exclaimed the officer, with firmness. "The moment that I am again free, I shall collect my men and be upon your tracks. It will become the aim of my life to secure you again."

"Then nothing remains for me to do," said M'Donald, shrugging his shoulders, "but to take you some distance, —at least out of immediate communication with your men."

"And if I do not follow you willingly?" asked the officer, proudly.

"You will compel me to use violence!" answered M'Donald, gravely. "I am driven to extremities; and between me and crime but a narrow and scarcely visible boundary-line exists. I wished to lead a steady, retired, honest life—to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, and begin a new existence with a world which has ill-used me: even the recollection of everything that had passed was to be buried. Fate wills it otherwise, and I am firmly resolved to dare all. Condemned, although innocent, by a chain of circumstantial evidence; transported, ill-used by coarse overseers, and almost driven to madness, I took refuge in the bush. Hunted down, like a wild animal, I shall, if necessary, show my claws. You therefore have your choice. Either follow me willingly, and consent to be deprived of your freedom for a few days, as I followed you—underwent once more the tortures of the prisoner, or your death shall answer for your silence. However," he added quickly, and in a more tranquil manner, "you perceive our mutual position too well for me to say a word about it. You know perfectly well that I *cannot* act differently, if I do not wish to fall again into your people's hands. Therefore, spare me the bitter necessity of committing a deed of violence."

With these words he turned away from the officer, to leave him to his own reflections, and went to his horse, to set the bridle and saddle in order. He took his saddle-bag and pistol, which hung on Kakurru's horse, and replaced them upon his own, as well as the carbine which the black had taken from his victim. He threw the line round the neck of the officer's horse, and beckoning his prisoner to follow his example, vaulted into the saddle.

Walker arose to comply with the order. "I only yield to force," he said, gloomily; "and I give you my word that I shall devote my life to avenge this insult."

"That you know this life to be in my hands, and still dare to say so, shows more confidence in a bushranger than the police usually are inclined to honour them with," said M'Donald, with a smile. "But, however that may be, I desire nothing from you; you may do your worst as soon as I have placed myself out of your reach. Now, mount, Mr. Walker; in the first place we will retrace our steps, and thus avoid the chance of falling in with your men. Will you go with me, Kakurru?"

The glossy black had in the meantime been examining the captured officer with a grim joy, only testified by his repeatedly and contentedly passing his hand over his fat-covered limbs. At this question he shook his head.

"Where to, Jacky?"

"Back, and past the station," replied M'Donald, "and then towards the west."

"Certainly," replied the black, with sparkling eyes, "at least, as far as the houses of the white men. Much tea there to-day, and bread, and sugar, and tobacco."

"To-day?—there?" asked M'Donald, with surprise: "what do you mean?"

"We shall see" answered the black, as, upon a sign from M'Donald, he took the officer's saddle-bag and placed it upon his own horse. Walker had by this time mounted, and M'Donald guided the horses a little off the road into the bush, at the same time going in the direction of the station. But it was only when they reached the salt-bushes and Malley hills that he set spurs to his horse, and rode along much more quickly than they had done in the morning.

Kakurru kept at his side, pointing out the direction they were to take, and, as they came nearer the station, went upon an old sheep-track which led into the Malley hills. Under the protection of the hills they could easily ride round the station without being discovered. Several times Kakurru left the white men to follow their journey alone, riding, wherever the bush permitted, to the top of the hills, in order to gain a better view of the valley.

In this manner they had already crossed the road which led from the station to the Dry Swamp sheep-hut, when Kakurru, from a slight eminence to which he had ridden, beckoned to them to follow. M'Donald and Walker at the same time smelt smoke and saw a dark thick cloud wafted

towards them from that direction. In a few seconds they were at the side of the black, and could not suppress an exclamation of astonishment and dismay at seeing thick clouds of smoke rising from the buildings, the situation of which they both well knew.

"Good God! what is this?" exclaimed M'Donald, horror-stricken: "the station is on fire."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Kakurru. "Do you think that the black men will allow their blood to be shed and their young men to be shot down unavenged, like the dingoes? If you have the gun and long knife, the black has the spear and fire-brand, and knows how to use them. Nguyulloman gave the signal that the white men had left the station, and now it is time to seize and carry off into the mountains tobacco, flour, and sugar. Just follow the direction you have taken, Jacky; Kakurru is going there to get his share, and will then come after you."

"For God's sake, tell me what is going on!" exclaimed Walker, who did not understand a word of the information given by the native.

"The most horrible calamity!" M'Donald exclaimed, in fearful excitement and anxiety. "The men quitted the station, leaving the treacherous black cripple there as a spy; and he has given the signal, and the blacks are burning and plundering everything; perhaps murdering those who may fall alive into their hands."

"And I am powerless!" exclaimed Walker, gnashing his teeth in wild useless frenzy. "Man—devil!—can you look on quietly when——"

"Stop," said M'Donald, firmly. "In this case my own life and safety are of no consequence. Do your worst after this: do, in fact, with me what you will; you are free, and perhaps we shall be able yet to rescue those unfortunate people from the worst fate. Here," he said, as with hands trembling with eagerness and emotion he approached the officer, searching his pockets for the key of the handcuffs, "for God's sake be quick, for every moment's delay may bring death and misery upon the head of those who are dear to us."

"What are you going to do, Jacky?" exclaimed Kakurru, rushing between them, his eye darting fire and rage, and looking like a demon escaped from hell. "You will help the

white men? You will fight against the blacks? Is it for that I have freed you?"

"Back, Kakurru!" shouted M'Donald; "you mistook when you thought I should assist you in plundering and murdering. Back! or by the eternal God——"

"White dog!" roared the black, with unrestrained fury, swinging his short heavy waddy round his head, taking aim at the white man's forehead. The blow was given with such force that it must inevitably have fractured the skull of the victim, if M'Donald had not warded it off with his left arm. He seized his foe in his iron grasp and hurled him aside, while with his right hand he drew a pistol and presented it at the breast of his antagonist.

Kakurru's arm moved as if he were about to hurl his weapon, but the pistol frightened him. He turned his horse's head, and, raising his arm in an attitude of menace against the white men, disappeared down the steep hill.

M'Donald did not even look after him. As soon as his attack was averted, all his thoughts and attention were directed to the rescue of those who were in danger. With the small key he unlocked the irons, which he took and hurled into the bush, and giving the officer his pistols, he shouted with a hoarse voice, stifled with alarm, "Now forward, sir! forward, for heaven's sake!"

Having severed the cord by which Walker's horse was still attached to his own, and putting spurs to his animal, he bounded, followed by his companion, down the hill, towards the salt-bush plain, and across it in the direction in which the smoke showed him but too plainly where assistance was needed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLACK CRIPPLE.

THE station, that usually presented so lively and animated an appearance, was still and lonely on that morning, when its owner, to dissipate the sad thoughts that still filled his heart respecting the scenes of the previous evening, mounted his horse, and, accompanied by his sons and his stock-keepers,

rode into the bush to drive in a herd of horses. Bill and one hut-keeper stayed behind with the women, as the other hut-keeper had to be sent to the out-station to fill the place rendered vacant by Toby's flight. No one thought of danger, particularly as the black police were still in the neighbourhood, and the natives usually left that part of the country where this much-dreaded force happened to be. As for the black cripple, whom, during the last few days, they had loaded with kindness, he could surely do them no harm. Indeed, he seemed to trouble himself but little about any one, and was only busy stirring and blowing his fire. His little attendant had to take him quantities of wood and bark. The white men had scarcely left the station, and disappeared among the Malley hills, when he separated his fire into three heaps, about six feet apart, and, as the flame burst high into the air, smothered it with rotten wood and damp bark, until out of each there arose a thin column of smoke.

No one at the station noticed his movements. The hut-keeper alone watched his doings with astonishment, and felt inclined to go and ask him whether he intended to exhaust his supply of wood at once. The waste of wood interested him, inasmuch as he had to get the supplies of that article for the kitchen and the house; and on that account the wood-destroying blacks, who got everything they could lay their hands upon to burn, had long excited his anger. In order to make inquiries, he would have been obliged to go up the sand-hill; and as he was freed from every responsibility in the matter, he considered it too irksome. So, comfortably stretched out before his hut, he watched the cripple's strange proceedings until his eyelids grew heavy. How long he had been lying thus he did not himself know, when he was suddenly aroused by loud, boisterous cries. He started up, half frightened, thinking his master had returned, when he suddenly perceived a troop of blacks, armed with spears, descending from the hill upon which Nguyulloman was still sitting between his fires, and advancing straight towards him.

"Has the devil brought these dark-skinned rascals back again?" muttered he to himself. "I suppose they liked the mutton; but I'll be hanged if they get as much as a bone from me. If master is willing to feed these black dogs he may do so, but I'll have nothing to do with it."

The blacks—eight men—some of whom were painted red

and white, in the meantime approached him without much ceremony; and one of them walked up to him, and said in his horrible, broken English:—

"Come, give tobacco and flour—quick! I flour-bag, money, much—quick!"

"You white money?" said the hut-keeper, a testy, sour old fellow, who had been liberated several years before with a ticket-of-leave. "You look as if you carried white money about in your cheek pouches. We don't sell anything here. Master is not at home. When he returns, you may buy."

"You—quick!" said the black, pushing the hut-keeper by the shoulder; "quick!—you hear?"

"Zounds!" shouted the latter, in the greatest passion; "touch me again, and I'll blow out the brains of every one of you!"

He had not time to utter another word; one of the blacks struck him with a waddy upon his head, and he fell, senseless, to the ground. The others thrust their spears into his body with wild cries of triumph. This was the signal for a general assault; and from three or four different sides the various bands emerged. The greater part of them rushed to the well-known storehouse and broke open the door, whilst about eight or nine directed their steps towards the house.

Sarah was standing at the window, gazing sadly and silently at the river, when the first noise attracted her attention. The thought of this sudden danger shot through her heart like ice; for even the possibility of an attack from the blacks had always frightened the ladies, and even embittered many a joyful hour. And now, all this was a fearful reality. Bill's voice first brought her to herself.

The boy had seen the blacks descending the hill, and was just on the point, in his bold way, of stepping out to support the hut-keeper, when the murder of this unfortunate man showed him the impending and rapidly-approaching danger. However, cool and collected beyond his years, he soon made up his mind—locked the door, barred it, and told his sisters to shut the lower shutters, whilst he ran up with a gun to resist the first attack from that position. It was indeed high time that something was done. The vanguard of the band were already running round the small dwelling-house, endeavouring to find an entrance somewhere, whilst the remainder were plundering the stores. Bill, armed with his

double-barrelled gun, stepped to the window, and, without a moment's hesitation, shot one of the fiercest of the band.

The shot was fired in the very nick of time. These savages have a peculiar dread of fire-arms, and all of them sought to place themselves as quickly as possible out of the reach of the deadly weapon. The women, half dead with fear and terror, thus gained time to close the shutters of the ground-floor, through which the blacks would otherwise easily have made their way; and Sarah gave her brother the other guns, which were always kept loaded in one of the rooms.

"The shot has driven the rascals back," exclaimed Bill, with exultation; "and our friends must hear it. If we can only maintain our ground for half an hour, we are sure to receive aid."

"We are lost!" said Sarah, sinking down upon a chair. "Good God! No help at hand—the whole station deserted. All—all away!"

"If I only had George and Mr. Bale or M'Donald here," muttered Bill! "It would be the finest fun—how we should pepper the black rascals! There is another looking up. Just show your black hide a little, my fine fellow, and I will settle your account!"

"Oh, do not fire unless you are forced!" cried Sarah: "you will only exasperate them the more."

"Exasperate!" repeated Bill. "They have smelt blood, and will do their worst, any how. Take this gun, Sarah, and fire it off out of one of the other windows."

"I cannot commit murder," said Sarah.

"Nonsense," exclaimed the boy, angrily: "to-day we have no time for scruples—our blood or theirs. But, if you like, fire into the air, or in the direction of the storehouse. When they hear firing from two different sides, they will suppose that we are stronger than we really are, and perhaps our people in the bush may hear us."

Sarah did as her brother desired. She had learnt, during the years she had passed in the bush, how to handle a gun. But the blacks seemed to have given up their attack upon the house, and to be satisfied with plundering the storehouses, which Bill, naturally enough, could not prevent. The old men of the tribe did not, however, merely desire the booty, which they obtained so easily—they longed for vengeance for the blood that had been spilled. Whilst half of the troop

carried off the booty, others brought fire-brands into the kitchen adjoining the house and set it on fire. Protected by the roof of the kitchen, they advanced towards the door leading into the house, and tried to break it open, when Bill hastened down stairs, and fired his gun through the panel.

Unfortunately, the blacks had by this time discovered how weak the garrison was; and although Bill discharged all the guns from the different windows of the upper stories, they were not intimidated. A few of the enemies, protected by the smoke, had already taken the house in the rear, and, with the handles of their short waddies, were endeavouring to break open the shutters. Firebrands had also been thrown into the dwelling-houses of the two stock-keepers, whence the flames were already bursting forth, while the flames from the kitchen had reached the rafters of the house.

Bill perceived the danger in which they were placed, and was well aware that no mercy could be expected from their blood-thirsty enemies. The conviction that he was the only protector of his mother and sisters, endowed the boy with almost supernatural strength, and filled his young heart with wonderful coolness and enthusiasm. Calm as a veteran grown old in combats, he reloaded the guns, and ordered his sisters, who obeyed his commands implicitly, to take their mother into the corner room of the lower story, which was most distant from the fire, and whence, if things should come to the worst, they might at least gain the yard. Once outside, there was nothing left for him to do but to keep the savages at such a distance with his fire-arms that their spears could not reach them. At any rate, help must soon arrive.

At that moment one of the shutters fell in with a crash, broken in shivers by two of the most daring blacks. They had made their way through the opening, and, as Bill hastened to the spot, the wild yell of triumph of other enemies resounded from the back buildings. Two spears—he did not even perceive by whom they were thrown—pierced at the same time his coat and his left arm, and the next instant five blacks rushed in from opposite sides, and with demoniacal yells seized the ladies. Bill discharged his gun into the midst of them, and a shot was heard from the outside.

"Help!" resounded the terrified cry of Lisbeth, in the midst of the tumult, as one of the blacks seized her and

dragged her to the door, which had been burst open. Sarah was struggling with another; and as their mother lay insensible upon the ground, another shot resounded in the midst of this terrible noise and confusion, and Bill thought he saw, through the smoke, the forces of Walker and M'Donald battling with the blacks. But at this moment a boomerang hit him on the brow, stretching him insensible upon the ground.

"Hurrah! to the rescue!" M'Donald's full, powerful voice thundered above the howl of the blacks, who in their panic left the booty they had already seized, and, at this unexpected reinforcement, fled in all directions. They had recognised the much-dreaded uniform of the chief of the black police, and imagined that they were surrounded and must be taken prisoners.

"Out of the house!" shouted Walker to the ladies, without even bestowing a look on the black who had seized Lisbeth, and whom he had felled to the ground with a blow of the butt-end of his pistol. "The house is on fire; save yourselves!" and with his strong arm he lifted the old lady, who was still insensible, and rushed out with her. M'Donald, carrying the boy, followed him. They had, however, scarcely reached the open space in front of the house, when they perceived a troop of blacks, led by Kakurru, advancing to the attack. The wild yells and howls of the infuriated savages filled the air, and spears, fortunately badly aimed in their blind rage, flew in all directions.

"Now is the time, M'Donald!" exclaimed Walker, mingling in the fight with wild enthusiasm. "Two against twenty, that's fair odds against these black dogs.—Hurrah! Old England for ever!"

With these words, he threw his useless pistol into the midst of the troop, and drawing his sword, rushed upon the enemy.

M'Donald, holding a pistol in his left hand, and a long, heavy knife in his right, kept close to Walker's side. Kakurru confronted Walker, who, with one blow of his sword, split the black's skull. But his comrades were still pressing forward with wild yells. They knew they had the advantage of numbers, saw victory certain, and the blood which had been shed had driven them into a wild and desperate rage. Their battle-cry resounded in the air, their

spears and boomerangs fell in showers, and Walker tottered on receiving a blow from one of the latter.

"Hurrah!" resounded in the midst of the noise and tumult of the fight; "here, my boys, at them!" and with a flying leap over the fence, discharging his pistol into the midst of the troop, and mowing the affrighted blacks down right and left from his horse, like God's wrath, the sergeant came rushing on, followed by four or five of his men. Like spray before the wind, the black foes scattered in all directions.

"Hurrah!" shouted the old soldier, giving the spurs to his foaming steed, and with every blow of his sharp weapon he struck one of the fugitives to the ground. "Hurrah! Tally ho!—at them! at them! Hurrah! you rascals, we've caught you!—hurrah!"

The flight of the blacks was general. The greater portion of their troop had already made off with the booty, leaving the destruction of the whites to a small number of their young men. Those who could save themselves from the unexpected attacks of the old sergeant and the black soldiers, who followed them like the impersonification of revenge, fled, some into the malley-bushes, some to the river, into which they dived to get out of the reach of danger.

Walker, not taking time to look after his horse, pursued the fugitives on foot; but M'Donald, as soon as the ladies were out of danger, ran hastily to his animal, which he had left at the fence, put his discharged pistols into the holsters, and vaulted into the saddle. He cast one more look at the fight, which was still raging, and with a quick pressure of his knee, led the horse towards the ladies. When Sarah heard the sound of hoofs behind her, she turned her head.

"M'Donald!" she exclaimed, on recognising the horseman.

"God bless you, and yours!" said the young man, bending over her in a friendly manner. The next instant his horse bounded towards the fence, which he took at a flying leap, and galloped away across the country.

"The devil!" exclaimed the sergeant, who had just turned his horse round, and was standing by his officer. "There goes our bushranger at full speed into the bush! After him, my boys, before he has passed the first Malley hill!"

"Stop!" said Walker, coolly and firmly; "the blacks are *there;* let some of the men pursue them, whilst the others

save what can be snatched out of the flames. But at the same time secure the black cripple, who is just creeping down the sand-hill towards the river. He is the spy of the band, and betrayed the place to them!"

The sergeant looked somewhat astonished at his lieutenant. Moreover, he did not understand how his officer and the prisoner, whom he thought many miles away, had so suddenly returned to the station, and what had brought them back at the very nick of time. In his opinion, the capture of the bushranger was much more important than the punishment of twenty troublesome blacks; however, he had to obey his superior's orders. A few soldiers were at once told to follow the enemy into the bush, and, if possible, to make some prisoners, whilst the sergeant, accompanied by one of his men, for how could he want more to secure a cripple, galloped towards the hill.

Nguyulloman, who had in the meantime been a most attentive and interested spectator of the events of the morning, had, with increasing uneasiness, seen the gradual arrival of reinforcements at the station, and the flight and defeat of his comrades.

However, he would keep his ground. No one would, he thought, know what an important part he had acted in the unlucky transaction; and if he remained perfectly quiet, the white men would do him no harm. After a few days, or when it grew dark, it would be easy for him to withdraw.

At the same time, however, he felt considerable uneasiness at the presence of the mounted blacks, who were being continually reinforced, and kept galloping about, until, with the exception of a few, the whole troop were assembled again on the station. He was just as little pleased with the attention which the officer, upon whom he kept his eyes, bestowed upon him, and he was creeping slowly down the hill towards the river, on his hands, when the sergeant cut off his retreat.

"Hallo! my old cross-spider!" the rough soldier shouted out to him; "on the retreat for some hole along the shore, eh? But you will not be able to give signals so easily down there. Wait, my hearty; we'll look out for a high airy place for you on a tree, where you will be able to make signals, with hand and foot, to your heart's content. Stop, I say, or else I shall mark your black skin with red streaks—do you hear?"

Nguyulloman understood but too well every word thundered forth by the sergeant, and found, to his horror, that either he must have been betrayed, or that the white men suspected the part he had acted. Either alternative was a dangerous one for him. But, however he might secretly gnash with his teeth, and crush the sand between his fingers, he could not defend himself against his enemies—could not even attempt to escape: a child would have overtaken him in the soft yielding sand. Wriggling before the soldier like a worm, he said, in a whining, entreating tone, and in an English which, although broken, was perfectly intelligible—

"Do not hurt a poor cripple. What do you want with me? Can I, poor unfortunate, do any one harm? All have forsaken me, even my boy, who has hitherto fetched me water and wood, and, dying with thirst, I was just creeping to the river."

"What a wretched image of man that is!" the sergeant muttered, as he examined the miserable being; "and such a venomous toad into the bargain. But wait, my boy; we'll cure you of these freaks."

"Water!" groaned the wretch, at the same time stretching the fleshless, skeleton-like legs from him, as if in suffering and agony.

"Hang it!" exclaimed the sergeant, turning from the loathsome form in disgust; "get him some water, Kaieko. It makes one feel sick to look at his spider's legs."

"Water!" groaned the wretch; and moved painfully and slowly after the soldier, who broke a piece of bark from the nearest gum-tree, and was running with it to the river to get water. The cripple kept moving like a lame toad through the sand towards the water, and his wide open lips seemed already to touch the longed-for draught. Kaieko was obliged to run about fifty paces down the shore, to find a place where he could get at the stream. To this place, however, the cripple kept advancing, as if the mere sight of water was a relief to him, while the sergeant watched his motions with horror and curiosity. He at the same time sheathed his sword: and, as Kaieko was returning with the water, dismounted from his horse, and threw his bridle over its neck.

Nguyulloman was about ten paces from the steep shore,

and looked round to the white man, as if for assistance. Again he stretched out his long, fleshless legs, and his countenance became distorted, his eyes fixed.

"May I become a black, if that is not the most horrible thing I have seen in the whole course of my life!" said the old soldier, turning away in disgust from the hideous form, when the latter, as if with a convulsive start, jumped into the air, and neared the river by at least two paces.

"Take care, you will fall into the river," cried the sergeant. "I say—hallo! what is that? The devil—the beast!"

He had cause to be astonished; for, suddenly, like a gigantic spider, throwing out his thin legs and dragging them along, placing his outspread hands on the soil, which was firmer here, the cripple drew his black body along with incredible rapidity over the ground towards the steep shore.

"Stop, there!" shouted the soldier, trying to cut off his retreat; but, like a ball of Indian-rubber, the black body leaped over the few paces that still separated it from the river, and before the sergeant could lay hold of the black lump, which had suddenly gained such a rapid motion—nay, before he could make up his mind what to do—the earth had crumbled away from the steep and soft brink of the shore, and with it the black rolled into the waves.

Kaieko, who had been sent for the water, altogether mistrusting the old fellow, had noticed his first movement. He returned, therefore, quicker than he went; and as the black form commenced bounding over the ground, he threw away the water, and, without further ado, took his carbine from off his shoulder. At the same moment the black mass rolled down the bank, and as the black soldier ran towards him, the sergeant shouted to him,—

"Let him alone, Kaieko; he will be food for the fish, and it is quite indifferent to us whether he is hanged or drowned."

"Nguyulloman drowned?" exclaimed Kaieko, holding his musket in readiness, and with flashing eyes watching the waves, to fire at him as soon as he should reappear; "the fish and lobsters of the Murray will drown as soon as the black sorcerer who cast a charm over my father and brother. If he shows but a hair ——"

He checked himself suddenly, and put the carbine to his shoulder; for the dark head with the flashing eyes had just emerged above, higher up the current. He disappeared with

the flash and report of the gun to come to the surface again immediately a few paces below. Like a gigantic frog, he swam two or three strokes against the current, whilst the legs, stretched out behind him, floated entirely on the surface. But, with his head turned cautiously round, he watched every movement of his enemies; and the sergeant had only time to seize his pistols when he disappeared again like a widgeon in the river.

The white man was still looking in the same direction, watching for the reappearance of the black, when the soldier at his side took hold of his arm and pointed *down* the river, about a hundred paces from them. Nguyulloman's wild features were seen there above the surface of the water, only to disappear again as quickly. They now waited in vain to see him come up again: he remained invisible. Near the branch of a tree that had fallen into the river, with his mouth and nose only above the surface, the savage was lying concealed, entirely covered by the wood, and it was only when he had quite rested himself and recovered his breath, and was no longer observed by his enemies, that he swam down with the current.

The black police had meanwhile, under the direction of Walker, stopped the progress of the fire, and saved some of the furniture, when Mr. Powell, with his sons and stock-keepers, came at the full speed on their foaming horses.

"There is your father," said Walker, approaching the ladies, who were busily engaged attending their brother, who had just recovered his senses. "You no longer have anything to fear. Besides, six of my men can remain here to assist you, and I myself shall not leave the country before I have driven this treacherous tribe out of your neighbourhood, and punished them for this deed. You may sleep in peace."

He went to his horse, which one of his men brought to him, and jumped into the saddle.

"You are going to leave us!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell, stretching out her hand towards him. "Oh, do not run away so soon!"

"We should have been lost had it not been for you," said Lisbeth, with her eyes full of tears.

"Your gratitude I must share with another," said Walker, sadly, avoiding the scrutinising glance which Sarah fixed upon

him; "but," he added quickly, and with peculiar emphasis, "I have now *other* duties to perform. I must first pursue the *most dangerous* banditti, recapture their booty, and rid the country of the blacks. Should you, in the meantime think of me now and then, let it not be with hate."

"Mr. Walker!" cried Sarah, in tones of entreaty.

Walker waved his hand, as he put spurs to his horse. The owner of the station came in at one side, and he left it at the other, paying no heed whatever to the shouts of the old gentleman. Walker hastily assembled a few of his men, and rode with them into the bush.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BUSH TAVERN.

At a strange bend in the Murray, the river, that had previously flowed to the westward, changed its course, and went straight to the south, pursuing that direction to the end. Near this bend, in a district which the natives called Kullangany, stood a small, insignificant bark shanty, the owner of which seemed to be something between a squatter and farmer. He might be called a squatter, inasmuch as he rented from Government pasture-grounds, of no great extent, upon which he kept a few thousand sheep, about fifty head of cattle, and ten or twelve horses—a farmer, inasmuch as he had purchased, close to the river, and at a pretty good landing-place, about four or five acres of land, on which he made the attempt—which could scarcely be considered a serious one—of growing vegetables and corn.

In those parts the banks of the Murray are of a very peculiar nature, and of an entirely different character from those below the Bomin Lake. Flat and clayey in the latter place, they are steep and precipitous in the former. Walls of limestone, frequently interspersed with the most remarkable shell fossils, rise perpendicularly to the height of several hundred feet out of the bed of the river, enclosing, on an average, a narrow valley of from four to twelve hundred paces in breadth, over the grey clayey soil of which the river meanders, in some parts two hundred paces broad. This valley is extremely fertile, and would produce the most

splendid crops, if the good land were not, almost without exception, exposed to inundations from the river. Almost every year, and just at harvest time, the Murray overflows its banks, and prevents the farmer from securing his harvest. Only a few favoured localities are excepted from this visitation. On one of these M'Pherson had laid out what might rather be called a garden than fields. His estate comprised about four or five acres, on which he cultivated some wheat and potatoes, and other vegetables. His principal trade was, however, the sale of spirituous liquors, which, with or without a licence, he carried out to a great extent; and most of the labouring men of the Murray Valley who passed his house were his customers. It is true, that sometimes for weeks he did not sell one shilling's worth; but the next troop of bundlemen, who carried their year's wages in their pockets, richly compensated him for such a season of inactivity. The sovereigns rained out of their pockets into his as fast as he could empty his small casks, stowed all over the house, into bottles and glasses. Then the ordinarily quiet shanty in the bush was filled with wild, boisterous merriment, tumult, and fighting, and all the passions which gambling and brandy can call forth.

The life of these bushmen is, indeed, a strange one, and almost as wonderful and extraordinary as the country itself, and a large portion of its natural products. Nearly all the year they live with as few wants as an Indian, dragging on their hard, joyless existence in work, or in the occupation of a shepherd, bullock-driver, or stock-keeper. During this time they never see money, and rarely taste spirituous liquors, until at last, at the expiration of their twelve months, they are paid their wages, and hasten to the nearest grog-shop, not to *enjoy* their hard-earned gains, but to *drink* them out in the shortest possible time.

They do much the same inland as the sailor does at the seaports, although the latter has much more excuse for his conduct. Exposed to a life of danger, death may overtake him at any moment, and he can never depend upon reaching port; therefore he spends in "merry-making," as he calls it, what he has gained in his voyage. For whom is he to save? What is he to do with money at sea? And then, his time for rest is so short, that he wastes his hard-earned pieces of gold as quickly as he can.

The Australian bushman has no such excuse. On the con-

trary, a few years' savings would easily enable him to commence life upon his own account, acquire some property, and place himself in an independent position. He *knows* he can get safe investment for his money—*knows* it would bring him good interest, and knows that, as long as he remains a common labouring man, he will always lead at the bush a miserable and dependent life.

But in spite of all this, he tries, with a sort of feverish anxiety, to get rid of the only thing which could help him to an independent position—ready money. He squanders his hard-earned gains without even receiving in exchange a single enjoyment, unless we consider as such, that of acting the "swell," for a few days, scattering his gold about him, and plying his body with copious draughts of spirituous, and mostly adulterated, liquors. Then follow a few days of wretchedness, until his stomach and head have recovered from such indulgence. Without a penny in his pocket—nay, perhaps without a pocket to put a penny in if he had one—it is by no means an uncommon occurrence to see them selling their very clothes off their backs in order to prolong the half-conscious state for a few hours. Then he sneaks back into the bush, and goes through another year's hard work to purchase such another week.

M'Pherson kept one of these bush taverns, provided not only with the common bad brandy and gin, but with all sorts of—at least differently ticketed—wines, and even imitations of champagne. The taste of these wild fellows is sometimes of a very peculiar and extravagant kind, and the host knew how to make the best of his merchandise. Although but few guests had visited his house during the last three weeks, the chance of more custom at last cheered his spirits.

Seven or eight bushmen, having their year's wages, partly in cash, partly in paper, in their pockets, arrived at his house early in the morning, and had taken up their quarters with him. They inaugurated their "freedom" by reclining comfortably under a tree, round a bottle of brandy. Their destination was Adelaide, and they only intended to make this a halting-place for a short time. To-day was to be a day of rest; consequently they did not intend to get drunk; and on the following morning, at break of day, they proposed to set off for the distant capital of the district, where they resolved to commence their carousals in good earnest.

However, M'Pherson was of a very different opinion upon this subject.

These men were the roughest and wildest of their class, such as the earlier English system of transportation brought together only in this part of the world. Physiognomies seen at the gallows and in gaols. Men who had led a life of crime, without any hope in the future, intent only on satisfying the present; their language was one prolonged curse—continual blasphemy. Yet, that trait of the blunt, honest English character, a curious mixture of droll humour, self-reliance, and bidding defiance to every one and everything, was not wanting in these reprobates.

With one exception, these fellows were old convicts, or, as they called themselves, "old hands;" and this was a fact that needed no further assurance than a glance at their faces. Amongst themselves, they considered it as a matter perfectly understood, and would have thought it highly ridiculous in any of them to wish to deny it. M'Pherson himself coquetted with his "olden times," and, as he sat down by them, had to tell them lots of anecdotes of this or that magistrate, this or that "old cove," which all dated back to the times when *free* emigrants were among the natural curiosities of Australia.

The ill-treatment of the convicts in early times, induced them to endeavour to outwit the officials. Their conversation naturally turned upon the present; and the news that the native mountain police of New South Wales were now on the borders of the Adelaide district especially attracted their attention.

"Hang the black dogs!" said Bob, a bullock-driver, and one of the most prominent characters of the troop, accompanying his exclamation with a blasphemous oath; "is it right to use these blacks as blood-hounds, to catch a poor fellow who has made his escape, or to kill him in the bush like a wild dog?"

"These are all new-fangled inventions," answered Dick, a shepherd, "which have been hatched by the 'swells' in the towns, and by which they fancy they do the country a favour. Why, they have even sent us a priest to our station!"

All burst out into a violent shout of laughter.

"That just suits you, you rogue," said Mac, a stock-keeper from the North-West Bend. "A man who spends all his life

creeping at the tail of his sheep cannot object to having a priest sent for his religious consolation."

"Creeping at sheep's tails!" said Dick, angrily. "Cow or sheep's tails, it is pretty much the same; and if I had horse-flesh under me, we should see which of us would take the ugliest fences and ditches. You stock-keepers always consider yourselves so much better than the shepherds."

"Nonsense," cried Jack, another shepherd, who came from the same station as Dick; "don't trouble your head with these old stories, especially as we are sitting round the same bottle of brandy!"

"And a precious shame it is," said M'Pherson, laughing, "that we have but one!"

"Well, then, make it two if you like," said Bob. "We want our money, and cannot leave it here in the bush. I say, my boys, we'll let the 'swells' of Adelaide see what we can do, and show them that we are at home there as well as in the bush."

"Pooh! your money!" exclaimed M'Pherson, contemptuously, and with an oath that would not have shamed the bullock-driver: "who spoke of your money? If I offer you a glass, you don't fancy I wish you to pay for it! But, my boys, I have got some good peach brandy, soft as butter and fiery as—as——"

"Hang your comparisons," exclaimed Bob, impatiently; "bring us the stuff, that's the main point; we'll soon make the comparisons ourselves. What have we to pay for this bottle?"

"Plenty of time," said M'Pherson, hurrying into the house; "try the other first."

"Have you seen the black police, Mac?" asked Bob, when the host had gone. "Curse the fellows! they have not passed *this* way."

"Oh no; they went through the bush," replied Mac, while the others listened with much interest. "I think they were on the tracks of a couple of 'old coves' who had 'planted' somewhere about there. One of these blackamoors came to the North-West Bend, and sent another of them away to fetch the frontier police of South Australia to their aid."

"Just what I imagined!" said Dick, with an oath, striking the ground with his fist. "These fellows have been trying to make the country unsafe! There is not a hut but they creep

into it, asking to see every honest man's pass; and we shall at last have to tell them where we got the coat upon our back. I wish they were at the devil!"

"Red John is up in that direction," whispered Mac to his companion, as if afraid lest the host should hear him.

"The devil!" exclaimed Dick, "you don't say so?—Well, he is a fellow of the right sort. But if he once has the blacks at his heels, he won't long eat damper in the bush."

"Let him alone for that," said Bob, laughing; "he is the boy. But you need not speak so low, M'Pherson won't peach."

"The deuce trust the innkeepers," muttered Mac; "they peach or don't peach, just as it suits them best. If Red John came here with his pockets full of cash, the devil a word would M'Pherson peach against him. But if he had nothing but the price set upon his head, he would not require to be asked twice; nay, he would himself assist in putting the 'darbies' round his wrists."

"Well, it must be rather pleasant to have a reward like that placed upon one's head," said Mike, a ration-carrier at one of the neighbouring stations. "A fellow at last learns what he really is worth. No one cares a fig about him until he has shown the gentlemen of the justice that he has no need of them, and knows how to get his own grub and manage in the bush. They immediately grow jealous, and experience such a sudden love for him, that they would give a whole pocket full of money to see him again and take care of him."

The sixth member of the party was a young fellow of the name of Ralph, not quite so rough as the rest, although life in the bush had given him a sufficiently wild appearance to render him by no means out of his place in the company in which he found himself. It was very possible that he had not been transported, and was a free emigrant, with an honest life to look back upon; but if such was the case, he carefully concealed the fact, and mentioned nothing of the sort before his older companions, whose experience he held in the greatest respect. However, he did not seem to understand Mike's observations, and he broke silence by saying,—

"After all, it must be a fearful feeling to know that one's name is in the papers, and that everybody has the right to arrest you and give you up to justice."

"Now, d—n it!" said Mike, laughing and striking his

broad fist in his open palm; "ain't *he* green. Why, my good fellow, how long *have* you been in Australia? Upon my word, I begin to think the fool paid his passage over."

"Bah!" exclaimed Ralph, blushing at the suspicion of being a free emigrant; "my mother's son has more sense than to pay for his passage, when her Majesty's ships bring folks over for nothing."

"God bless her Majesty!" exclaimed M'Pherson, just returning with a full bottle, and understanding something of the last speech. "Will no one pledge me?"

"We have nothing to say against her Majesty," growled Bob: "we once had a free passage. Give us something worth the trouble, and we will pledge you."

"Well, we have no very particular reason to be thankful either," muttered Mike.

"You have not, mate, I allow," said Dick, laughing; "she only gave you your life, and that's certainly the worst thing she had to give away."

"Indeed?" cried Mike, hastily turning to the speaker and laying hold of the brandy-bottle offered to him; "well, when I have joined the temperance society, the big-wigs shall point at me as a man to be looked up to——"

"As a warning example?" said Dick, laughing.

"No; he means when he tightens the rope," observed Bob, the rest joining with him in a loud horse-laugh.

Mike looked at them all round with a contemptuous, almost pitiful smile; then he filled his glass from the bottle, put it to his nose, emptied it at one draught, and then helped himself to a second.

"Hallo, Mike; stop there!" cried the rest, who began to fear, not without cause, of running rather short; "that is not fair play!"

"As long as you can amuse yourselves I do not like to disturb you," answered Mike, coolly sipping his second glass.

"Allow me," said M'Pherson, taking the bottle out of his hand and serving the others. "Now, gentlemen, do me the favour to taste *this* stuff, and then tell me——"

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Bob, striking his hat at his side with his fist. "I never was a gentleman, and I'll be hanged if I begin here in the bush. Gentlemen, indeed!"

"M'Pherson has something in his eye, or else he would not be so soft-spoken," said Dick.

"Well, mate, don't be angry," replied M'Pherson, laughing; "I meant no harm, nor did I wish to insult you. Moreover, I don't see why it should make anybody angry."

"Nor I either," growled Mike. "Esquire would sound just as well after my name as it does after that of 'Squire Fox and Squirrel; and 'Mister Mike, Esquire, ration-carrier,' would look well on a letter with an enclosure of 500*l*."

"Hang it, the brandy is really good!" was now the general exclamation. "Famous stuff this! Where did you get it, mate?"

"Where?—Direct from France," answered his smirking host. "It is a lucky thing to have friends at the port, who can land a cargo of something wet without much bother. The day before yesterday I had a whole cargo of three or four different sorts of brandy, a cask of Scotch whisky, three or four kinds of wine, port, sherry, porter, and half-a-dozen baskets of the real 'Swells' tipple' (champagne). It cracks like a cannon, and throws bubbles and foam like a thousand-ton steamer."

"Hallo, Mac! we have come at the right time, I see!" exclaimed Dick, laughing. "I'll be hanged if I go away before I have tasted at least a little of everything. We shall have plenty of time to go to Adelaide; and, after all, we might leave the good stuff behind us here and drink whatever they think fit to give us."

"Yes; but I know this much," answered Jack, shaking his head: "if we once begin *here*, we shall never get any further: we shall not even see the mountains. Of course, you may do as you like. I must go to the settlements, whether you go with me or not; and at least I'll take good care of my wits. You may do what you please."

"Thanks, my boy," said Mike; "you are deuced kind, indeed, to give us leave to do as we choose. Well, what's the matter with M'Pherson, making a grimace as if he had invented a new sort of handcuffs, or a model prison with a reformatory! Well, what's up, my buck? A screw loose somewhere?"

"Do you know?" whispered the host to Bob, who was sitting next to him——

"Well, what? That they'll soon settle your sly grog-shop, eh? One needn't be a prophet to perceive that."

"Don't speak of the devil, boys, and don't shout so loud,"

replied M'Pherson, looking about him uneasily, as if he was afraid to be heard even in the midst of this wilderness. "Who do you think is somewhere about here in the bush?"

"Well, you old owl, who is it?" asked Bob, laughing; "his Excellency the Governor?"

"Nonsense," answered the host, angrily; "Jack Loudon!"

"Well!" said Bob, quietly.

"Well!" repeated M'Pherson, with astonishment; "Jack Loudon, the celebrated bushranger!"

"Celebrated?" answered Bob, with a contemptuous sneer. "Who made *him* celebrated, I should like to know?"

"Who?—The governor. Are there not 100*l.* set upon his head?"

"It would be worth the trouble indeed to catch him," said the bullock-driver, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I have it from people who must know better than anybody else, that Jack Loudon is as much fit to be a bushranger as Ralph there, and *he* wouldn't be worth *five* pounds."

The others laughed; but M'Pherson, who would not permit any one to underrate the importance of his news, said angrily—

"Well, I suppose you know better than the police. When they offer so much money, you may be pretty certain they know what they are about."

"The police, if you have no objection," said Mike, gravely, "may go to grass. Red John has been all his life a better bushranger than Jack Loudon. 'Live with the wolves, and not howl with them,' is his motto. Steal a horse like a man, and pay for it like a booby! Bah! so much for him! Why, did he even strike a single blow at the mail business? On the contrary, he shot fat Pad down because he wanted to get somewhat better acquainted with the pretty girl in the chaise. Such a two-faced rascal may go to the devil, for my part; and if they caught him, and hanged him, I would drink a bottle to the health of the sheriff, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't! No; Red John is another sort of a fellow, and worth five thousand pounds, if they offer one hundred for Jack Loudon."

"Hallo, mate! you talk as if you knew them both!" said M'Pherson, laughing.

"Bah!" cried Bob, with a shake of the head: "those times are gone. The bush is too dry, and there are rascally

spies sitting at every corner. There's no more fun in the business; and then, it is more fit for *young* people. When one grows old, one likes to earn so much a year in a safe manner, instead of being hunted like a dingo. Since I got my pass, I thrash bullocks instead of the police, and don't wish to hear anything more of the concern."

"And with that he is emptying the whole bottle!" exclaimed Mac. "Come, mate, that's not sharing fairly!"

"What say you, lads, to another bottle of the same stuff?" exclaimed Ralph; "I'll pay for it."

"Bravo, mate! There is something in the fellow after all," said Dick, laughing.

"But that must be the last bottle," expostulated Jack. "We'll drink the rest in Adelaide, or call here for it on our return."

"Ah, ah! I thought you were going to run all the way to Adelaide without stopping," said Ralph, laughing; "but here's M'Pherson coming back already. He must have had the bottle behind the door."

"He is an old fox," muttered Bob; "but I have some notion he'll find he is mistaken this time."

But M'Pherson was *not* mistaken, and he knew his men better than they probably knew themselves. He sought to entice them gradually to drink; treated them to a small cask of anchovies, which he brought out and served up with toasted damper; and at last they agreed not to leave his house that day. More he did not want: he knew perfectly well that after that they would not go away as long as their money lasted.

Drinking at once commenced in earnest. At the same time the woman of the house had to cook, roast, and serve up whatever the kitchen afforded. A young girl—a distant relation of the old man's, as he said—waited upon the guests, who were much pleased at seeing women-folks attending upon them once more. They continued in this manner, going on pretty temperately, until the afternoon, when Mac at last proposed to M'Pherson—what the latter had long been expecting—a game at cards, to "drive time into the bush" somewhat quicker. The rest would not hear of it. Mike agreed, and M'Pherson ventured a trifle and lost. This however, did not last long. First Bob, then Dick, went to the table; bottle after bottle was brought out; the merri-

ment waxed louder and louder, and the whole set were in the greatest tumult, when a new guest—a strange bundle-man—arrived at the hut, and threw his pack upon the ground to rest himself a little. He saluted the men, without however joining them, and asked M'Pherson to give him some meat and a damper.

"Hallo, mate! where do you come from?" said Bob, looking round to him from the card-table. "Downwards?"

"Yes: from the Rufus!" replied Miller, our old acquaintance of the Dry Swamp sheep-station."

"Hallo!" said Mac; "then perhaps you'll be able to tell us what's going on there. There is said to be a devil of a row of some sort or the other brewing. M'Pherson, man, give the poor mate a drop to drink, and don't let him die of thirst here!"

"Thank you," said Miller, casting a longing, shy glance at the bottle offered to him; "I never drink brandy."

"Hurrah! Here is a temperance man!" shouted Mike, with his deep voice. "Come here, my boy, and let us have a look at you; we have long wished to see such a bird of paradise in the bush. Have you taken the pledge?"

"Not yet," answered Miller, blushing; "but I mean to do so."

"Well, then, this is just the right time, before the gate is shut, my man," said M'Pherson, filling to the brim a glass of the already *paid-for* brandy, and giving it to him. "*Looking out* for work, or leaving it?"

"Leaving it," replied Miller, still hesitating about taking the glass.

"But drink, mate, in the devil's name," exclaimed Jack, in a friendly manner, no longer in a hurry to start for Adelaide. "When you have rinsed your throat a little, you can tell us how things are going on at the Rufus, and what's the row with the black police. The dust and heat are enough to choke one."

"That is true," said Miller, taking the glass with hesitation. "Well, mates, your health, and a happy return," he added, in a lower voice, as if speaking to himself, as he seized the proffered glass, raised it to his lips, and emptied it at *one* draught.

"Pretty good stuff that," said M'Pherson, laughing. "Bless me, my man, you take a good draught, and you will

be a capital catch for the temperance gents. They will make something out of you. You are a shepherd ?"

"Hut-keeper," Miller modestly answered, wiping his mouth with his coat-sleeve.

"And have been dismissed ?" asked Mac.

"You have guessed right," replied Miller, feeling that by an unvarnished tale of his mishap he would soonest obtain the sympathy of the men in whose society he was now accidentally cast.

"No police business, I hope ?" asked M'Pherson, cautiously.

"Go to the devil!" exclaimed Bob, angrily. "Is it any business of yours what one does in New South Wales ? or have you any right to examine people when they get out of the way of the black blue-coats ?"

"Nothing to do with the police," Miller quietly replied, whilst the players suspended their game for a short time, in order to learn something of what interested them all so much. "As far as I know, the police are after other game ; and, if what I heard yesterday at the North-West Bend be true, they have already caught two of the worst, and shot them."

"The devil!" exclaimed Mike, striking the table with his fist: "did you see anything of them ?"

"Little enough," answered Miller, drawing the table towards him upon which Mrs. M'Pherson had just served his simple meal, "unless the fellow who got my place be one of them. He looked wild and desperate enough for anything."

"What sort of man was he ?" said Mike, who seemed to take a particular interest in the affair.

"A very strange kind of fellow, indeed," replied Miller. "He looked as if he had been knocking about in the bush, God knows how long ! and had forgotten what soap and a looking-glass are like. He had red hair and beard, blue eyes, a face very much freckled, and had an ear-ring in his left ear. He had also a capital double-barrelled gun, and did not seem to care very much about it when the upper stock-keeper saw it."

"Hem !" muttered Bob, kicking Mike with his foot under the table. "They caught him, you say ?"

"Why, I don't know that," replied Miller, sulkily, working away at the victuals placed before him. "During the night the blacks broke into the sheep-yard and drove the

sheep off, and then they sent me away and engaged the other man."

"And deducted the value of the animals from your wages, eh, mate?" asked Ralph, apparently particularly interested in the matter.

"No, they did not; I was paid my wages to the last penny."

"The devil you were!" they all exclaimed, with surprise. "And what is the name of the old possum who came out so strong with the cash?"

"Powell—a kind old gentleman."

"And so they sent you to the devil?"

"Here, at least," replied Miller, with a smile, knowing his men.

"Bravo, my boy!" exclaimed Jack, pleased with the answer. "It is worth another glass—here, M'Pherson——"

"Were you long at that station?"

"About a year."

"So much the better; we all row in the same boat. We have all served a year, and are come to have at least one free day, after a twelvemonths' life like a dog. I am sure one can't do less."

"I should like to enjoy myself a little again," muttered Miller, gloomily; "but it won't do—I must go home."

"Hallo! home?" Mike asked, laughing. "I thought I heard you muttering something about a 'happy return.' Are you, perchance, a 'happy husband and father,' as they say in the settlements?"

The other laughed at the idea that a hut-keeper ranging the bush should be married. Miller shook his head, and said,—

"Nonsense—married, indeed! Of what use would a wife be here among salt-bushes and sheep? I wish the whole concern were at the devil, and in the end——"

"Well, what are you talking about, mate? There, take another draught; it will set you to rights, and you will understand better what you have to do. How do you like it?"

Miller had taken the glass, emptied it again at one draught, and ordered a bottle of the innkeeper, to stand treat in his turn.

The carousal now commenced anew. The German—for such they soon perceived him to be by his accent—had to recount everything that had taken place before he left the Rufus. The rest drank freely to him, and he soon overcame his reserve, and joined in the carousal with the rest. Every fresh bottle, of which the busy M'Pherson was but too eager to draw the cork, increased his excitement. They ordered wine, as brandy got into their heads too quickly; M'Pherson made the proposal himself, and brought several bottles of different sorts for his guests to taste—just to look at, as he said. They were, however, scarcely placed before them, ere they were emptied, and the whole company had reached such a degree of wild, boisterous, and drunken merriment, that they pushed the card-table aside, and commenced dancing. At the beginning of the game, it had been agreed that the winner should invest his gains in liquors, for the benefit of the whole company.

The sun was setting, when Bob, striking the table with his huge fist—for, missing his bullocks, he was obliged to hammer something—exclaimed, with a tremendous oath,—

"Hallo, mates, we shall never meet again so young as we are now, and I have had quite enough of this common stuff—this brandy and wine. We are just as good as these swells, with their white hand-cases and patent boots, and deserve quite as rich tipple. Who is for a few bottles of the sparkling 'swells' tipple?' We'll play at bushranger with bottles of champagne!"

"Hurrah for the swell's tipple!" shouted Ralph, whose head already suffered from his copious libations; "out with the silver necks, we'll soon twist them!"

"That's right, my boys," cried M'Pherson, with a joyous countenance, for now he felt secure of his prey. "We'll soon satisfy you! Here is the battery, and Toby shall bring glasses."

"And this, boy, shall do for the first," shouted Jack, taking out of his pocket a knife, with a corkscrew at one end, and seizing one of the bottles. "Now, we'll see what they have got in their bellies. The devil—the cork must be glued in, it is fast as iron."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Miller, advancing, now fully entering into the wild carousal. Taking one of the bottles, he re-

moved the wire, and said,—"That's rich; he wants to draw the cork of a bottle of champagne with the corkscrew. Here, Jack, look out!" he exclaimed, pointing the bottle at his head. He then cut the string, and pressed the cork. "Mind your head, I say——"

"Paff!" the cork came out with a loud noise, and struck Jack's head, who started back not a little astonished. The uproar became universal. The wine foamed in the glasses brought by the girl, and soon disappeared down the throats of this ever-thirsty crew. But the glasses did not hold enough for them.

"Plague on these long-waisted stupid things!" shouted Bob, dashing his into a thousand fragments upon the floor. "Let us have cups, that we may taste what we are drinking—or, better still, let us have a pail, Mac—hang it, let us have a pail, and we'll pour the whole lot into it."

"That's the way, my boy, to drink champagne," shouted M'Pherson, gladly humouring the mad pranks of these wild fellows. With this he fetched a pail which was standing against the house door, and, placing it between them, added, "Now, then, let the swells beat that, if they can!"

"Curse the swells!" shouted Bob, breaking the neck of one of the bottles against the nearest tree, and pouring the foaming liquid into the pail.

"Stop, I say, that won't do!" cried M'Pherson, perceiving that the rest were going to follow this example. "Hang it, bottles are not to be had so easily here in the bush. You have already broken *a* glass, *too*. Every bottle must ring, that's a sign it is good. The stuff costs one enough money as it is."

"Go to grass!" cried Ralph; "how much do you charge a bottle?"

"I cannot sell it under ten shillings," replied the host, with a shrug of the shoulders, at the same time removing as quickly as possible the wire from the rest. "Gentlemen who come here are always charged twelve."

"Hang the gentlemen! Let us have a dozen of them, and fire away now at the trees, but not at people's heads," said Jack, laughing.

The bottles stood close at hand, and were soon uncorked and emptied into the dirty pail. The noisy crew were provided with teacups, which they dipped into the foaming

liquor. Hastily they quaffed it, until it even trickled down their beards.

"Hang this wash!" shouted Mike, amid the general jubilation, "it is sour, and cuts one's inside. If the swells wish to drink such stuff they may, but I wont."

"I don't particularly like it either," said Dick; "but the deuce, if it cost so much money it must be good."

"I know how we'll make it palatable," shouted Bob. "Mac, let us have a few cups of brown sugar and two or three bottles of porter; this will take the acid out of this precious sour stuff."

M'Pherson was glad to do anything so that the liquors were sold. The porter came, and was poured into the pails, the sugar was stirred about, and the company, who now relished the drink better, roared and shouted. The sun was just setting, as a horseman appeared in sight, travelling from the east straight for the house. The wind carried the sounds of the revelry of the drunken set to his ears; he suddenly stopped and listened several minutes to the bacchanalian shouts. Once he appeared inclined to ride round the place. He even tried to turn his horse's head towards the bush, but the animal, obedient as it usually was, pricked up its ears, and gave a low and longing neigh.

"Poor brute," said the stranger, patting his animal's neck and bending over it; "you have carried me well, and I can easily imagine that you want something more than the few blades of grass you plucked in the bush. Come, my old fellow, we will both turn in, and if—but no matter. They will give us a little time, I hope, to rest a little."

Giving his neighing horse the rein, the traveller rode quickly up to the house, not without having first carefully examined the carousing group before it. On approaching, he seemed to pay no further attention to them, but merely nodded at those who greeted him. He led his horse behind the house, still keeping in the saddle, and waiting for the host, in order to learn from him what accommodation he had to offer.

M'Pherson was some time making his appearance. The revellers, whose attention the horseman had attracted, indulged in all sorts of suppositions respecting the stranger, what he could want at the inn, and his destination.

"Just mind, Mike," said Bob, "that's one of these police

spies, sneaking and poking about over the country. I shouldn't be in the least astonished if he were to come and count how many bottles we have had."

M'Pherson seemed to entertain exactly the same fear, for as soon as the traveller disappeared behind the house, he carried all the empty bottles he could lay hold of in-doors, where the women quickly stowed them away. He also invented an excuse for the present carousal, as he had no licence to sell brandy, and a search on his premises would have been most disagreeable to him. On this point he was soon set at rest, and he perceived that he had nothing to fear from his visitor. All he wanted was a good feed for his horse, and a morsel, with a bottle of wine for himself. He asked the host to let him have some quiet corner in his house, or at least some place away from the drunkards.

M'Pherson, delighted at being relieved from considerable fear, promised everything. The horse received a plentiful feed of oats in the hollowed trunk of a tree. M'Pherson watered it himself, and the women in the mean time laid the cloth for the stranger, who, naturally, had to be content himself with such fare as the boisterous company outside had left.

He ate his meal in silence, and the workmen felt hurt that he should keep aloof from them, and swore that he was, to all appearance, too proud to eat and drink at the same table with them.

"Hang the puffed-up swell!" said Jack. "Is that the way to come into a hut, and not even speak a word to the guests assembled? I wish the meat may choke him, and the wine turn to poison."

"Leave him alone!" growled Mike. "After all, there is no doing anything with such swells, and they only sneak from one station to the other, carrying the news. Hurrah, boys! the bush is ours. Hang these nonsensical fellows, and let every one that has a fine coat upon his back be ——"

"Stop, Mike," muttered Ralph; "then I must take mine off, for I only got it this morning from our worthy host—hang—hang him—he cheated me!"

"Never mind, keep it on," growled Mike, who, notwithstanding the enormous quantity of drink he had poured down his throat, was still almost perfectly sober, or at least cool. "We don't suspect you of being a gentleman, my boy; and now pick up your neighbour from under the table, and put

him on his stumps again. He was partly the cause of our having this sour stuff, and I'll be hanged if he shan't help to finish it!"

Miller, who was not accustomed to such indulgence, had already fallen down insensible. He was roused again by the cries and laughter of the rest, and had to begin anew. Unable at last to stand it any longer, he slipped away behind a bush, to get a nap for an hour or so. The rest paid no further attention to him; and, observed only by M'Pherson, he just reached a quiet place, when the sound of a horse's hoofs brought him to himself, and he looked up.

A horseman stopped before him, and looked at him for a few seconds, with a shake of his head.

"Hallo, mister!" cried the drunken fellow, with great difficulty; "are you—hic—are you going already? We have here—hic—some fine company, only—hic—gentlemen shepherds and hut-keepers; but—hic—hic—horrid sour champagne. I'll be hanged——" He staggered under the bush, looked round once more with his lack-lustre eyes, as if seeking for some one, and then fell back, to sleep away his inebriation.

The horseman was M'Donald, continuing his flight upon his well-fed horse. He looked for some time at the man lying before him, lost in meditation; then pressed the flanks of his faithful animal, and soon disappeared in the twilight of the evening.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GERMAN SETTLEMENT.

Close to Adelaide, bordering upon the capital of South Australia, the houses almost touching, or being at least within sight of each other, lay a small town, inhabited principally by Germans, and called Saaldorf. Its outward character was English; and the better sort of houses resembled English cottages in cleanliness and neatness of appearance; whilst others, with their tasteless, variegated colours, reminded one of the old home of their occupants. Everything, however, was in order. The hedges and railings were kept up in the best style; the streets were clean; the windows

brilliant. Small groups of fat-cheeked, healthy-looking children romped and played outside, looking somewhat more untidy than the buildings. The type of the German peasant youth, with their round chubby faces, could be plainly recognised in the majority of them.

This small place consisted perhaps of from thirty to thirty-five houses, with two churches, and as many inns, or "hotels." It was distinguished from the *English* towns of South Australia, inasmuch as it contained no jail, usually the centre of all towns in New South Wales. The land in the vicinity was also occupied chiefly by Germans; and the want of all such artisans and tradesmen had first allured a smith to settle there amongst his countrymen. Then followed wheel or cart wrights; then a saddler; then came two tailors and a shoemaker. These were shortly followed by a chemist; and a parson took the small flock under his care. Soon after, a doctor felt himself called upon to support the chemist; and joiner, butcher, whitesmith, &c. &c., followed, until all trades had their representatives.

Later, a few more ecclesiastics of different sects and opinions arrived, and they induced the inhabitants to build several churches; and at last the train was closed by a lawyer—Doctor Spiegel. Thus a regular little German town had arisen, surrounded by a mixed population of Germans and English. The border lands, each having a small separate home-stead, were mostly occupied by Germans; but a few Irish and English farmers also cultivated wheat, barley, potatoes, and other products.

The settlements in Australia are essentially different from those in the United States of America; inasmuch as in the former the price of land is by far higher than in America, and, consequently, the less wealthy class of immigrants can only buy a much smaller portion. They generally rent the land from an English owner, the tenant having the right of pre-emption, if put up for sale. They improve it, and pay from four to six pounds an acre. In the German settlements of Australia land is therefore mostly seen divided into squares, which are substantially fenced in, and usually contain from ten to twenty acres each. On every such station the German builds his house, and whatever else he may require, as seems most convenient to him, following his own taste, and almost invariably home-models. But the German village character

of such settlements is thereby, as may easily be imagined, entirely lost. Every one lives upon his own land, and it is only in the small towns, where the inhabitants have other pursuits besides agriculture, that they meet at one spot.

At Saaldorf, then, as this small place was called, lived amongst others, with whom we shall hereafter become better acquainted, the whitesmith Lischke. His lot of land adjoined the town, and he thus followed the double calling of a farmer and his profession. Whenever a lull in his generally brisk trade allowed him, he cultivated his land himself, or at least took care that his two men performed the necessary work. The household affairs were attended to by his wife Katharine and his daughter Susanna, at that time eighteen years of age.

Lischke, a very simple but extremely active man, had arrived in Australia about ten years before the time to which our story refers. He had not a penny in the world, and worked during the first year in the port, to pay for his passage. Through his industry, economy, and indefatigable exertions, he not only managed, after a few years, to farm a piece of land, with the right of pre-emption, but he took advantage of this privilege, and soon acquired the reputation of a man well to do. He certainly made a good deal of money, and both he and his wife took care of what they got. He was proud of owing all to his own exertions, and those who could say the same of themselves stood high in his estimation. He thought but little of his neighbours; and when he heard of somebody inheriting a great deal of money, or gaining it in some other unexpected and easy manner, his favourite saying was: "Plenty of humbug—easily gained, easily lost: they won't go on long, and they will soon be puzzled what to do."

On the morning on which the reader first makes his acquaintance, Lischke went to look at his fields, and was just returning along the broad road between the fences, with his hands in his pockets, a short pipe in his mouth, and looking very contented. He had got in the year's harvest most satisfactorily; his fields were in good condition; and the calculation he had made on his way of his probable gains was favourable beyond all expectation. As he slowly and contentedly sauntered along, he heard the sound of hoofs behind him, and a young man, evidently also a German, soon overtook him.

"Ah, it is you, Christian!" said Lischke, returning with a friendly nod the greeting of the rider, who dismounted and led his horse by the bridle. "How are you, and where do you come from this afternoon?"

"From Mülheim, Mr. Lischke. I went to order some maple wood for a job I have in hand."

"Indeed; and where are you going now—over the Torrens?"

The young man was silent for a minute, and he seemed to blush. At last he said, rather bashfully—

"The fact is, I wanted to see you, father Lischke, I—I have a request to make."

"To me?" exclaimed the whitesmith. "Something important, no doubt. Perhaps like the last time you came to me in great anxiety, with a very important request too, and after all it turned out that you only wanted to borrow my plate-shears to cut a few hinges. Ha, ha, ha!"

Christian Helling blushed deeper still, if possible, walked a few steps further in silence, and at last said, in a whisper—

"I wanted that very time to tell you exactly the same thing that I wish to speak about to-day; but I could not find heart to do so, and even now I can scarcely get it out."

"Get it out, man," said the old man, with a laugh; "but stop," he added, looking at him somewhat suspiciously, "I—I think I can guess what it is. You want to borrow money, and *honest* people have always some difficulty in getting this out, whilst rascals find nothing easier. Have I hit it?"

"No, father Lischke," replied the young man, turning quite pale. "It is, indeed, something more important still."

"More important still than borrowing money?" exclaimed the old man, stopping suddenly with astonishment.

"Yes," answered Christian, with a violent effort. "I—come to ask you for your daughter! Now then," he exclaimed, before Lischke could answer, "it is out, and I feel as if a mountain had been removed from my breast."

"My daughter?—hem!" said Lischke, looking rather surprised, and stroking his chin; "that's all? Well, Christian, we can talk this matter over. You are an honest fellow—have been thrown into the world from your childhood; but, by-the-bye, have you asked the girl what she thinks of it? After all, she must be consulted too."

"Not yet," replied the young man, half disconcerted. "I

wanted to know how it would suit you first, and whether you and Mrs. Lischke do not object."

"That's honourable," said Lischke, shaking the young man by the hand. "Look, Christian, I am pleased with your delicate way of proceeding. You are a decent fellow, and of the right sort. Then you have a good business; and I do not see how my wife can object to the proposal, even if she should at first miss the girl. I suppose Susan likes you?"

"I hope so, Mr. Lischke," replied Christian, cheerfully, and with a deep sigh. "We came over together, and, although we were both very young, we always liked each other, as brother and sister should do. I have thought of this for the last three years, and have been working like a horse in order to succeed at last."

"Three years," observed Lischke, smiling. "Then you have kept it deuced secret, for I never suspected anything of the sort."

"If Susan should have noticed it," said Christian, with some perplexity, "I don't care so much, as it was intended for her, and not for you."

"Well, I will tell you what, Christian," said Lischke, good naturedly; "I, for my part, have nothing to say against the proposal, and I will even speak with my old woman about it, and take your part in this affair."

"You are very kind."

"Never mind! You are a good fellow; you have worked your way up bravely, and have now good prospects. My old woman has, indeed, some pretensions about her Susey, and talks of great merchants, and all that sort of thing: but I don't approve of such ideas. There is plenty of humbug in the world, Christian—plenty of humbug. You are an honest fellow; and not only a good joiner, but you also understand farming. So, if you want the girl, and she likes you, of course, I have no objection to the match."

"Thank you heartily, Mr. Lischke," exclaimed Christian, joyfully, "and you may be sure that I shall never forget your kindness as long as I live."

"As you are in trim," said Lischke, just as they reached his garden gate, seeing his daughter through the palisade, "you can at once address yourself to the right person. There sits Susan, with her hands in her lap; so she has time to hear you, and the rest you may settle between yourselves."

With a friendly nod to his future son-in-law, he walked more quickly than he had before done towards the door of his house. Before entering, he cast another glance at his friend, and then disappeared into the house, shaking with suppressed laughter.

After Lischke had left him, Christian remained standing a good while in the middle of the road, heartily glad that he was concealed behind an elder-tree, so that Susanna could not see him. At last, however, he took heart. At any rate, the first step had been tried, and he could not retreat; and what he had in his heart must out, sink or swim. Therefore, fastening the horse to the nearest gum-branch, he went to the garden gate, opened it, and crossed the narrow path which led to a small bower. Susanna started up as she heard the gate opened; but when she perceived Christian, she sat down again, and, quietly waiting for him, stretched out her hand towards him.

"Well, how are you, Christian?" she asked, as he wished her good day, blushing deeply, in spite of his efforts. "How is it that you are dressed in your best clothes on a working day? Something very extraordinary must be going on. Are the English keeping holiday?"

"No, Susanna," said Christian, extremely embarrassed, and scarcely knowing how to begin. In fact, he could scarcely breathe for agitation.

"Well," answered Susanna, laughing, "have you been running fast?"

"No; I came on horseback."

"What is the matter with you, then? You seem so very strange?"

"Susanna!" exclaimed he, taking hold of her hand and keeping it in his, "I have a small request to ask of you."

"Just the same, I suppose, as that made the day before yesterday?" replied the girl, laughing, "when you wanted to know how to spell *damson?*"

"Nonsense," answered Christian, shaking his head; "I do not want you to spell anything; I only want you to tell me one little word."

"And that is——" said Susanna, starting from her seat in dismay, as if she suspected what was coming.

"Do you love me?" said Christian, his open countenance fixed upon her.

"Certainly," said Susan; but her laugh was forced, and her eye was fixed inquiringly on that of her companion. "That's very old, and I never had any cause to be angry with you."

"That's not what I mean, Susanna!" exclaimed the young man, mustering his courage for the decisive step: "I wish to know whether you——whether you would be my wife?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Susan, bursting into a loud laugh,—"whether I would be your wife? Well, I certainly never felt the desire. But tell me, Christian, have you been reading any of those pretty love tales, and wish to try yourself? You are making game of me?"

"No, Susanna," said Christian, feelingly, and looking steadfastly at her. "We have known each other from our childhood; we came in the same ship to this foreign land; and there is no one I love more in the whole world. If you will have me, say 'Yes.' I know very well," he added, in a somewhat lower tone of voice, as she looked at him in her laughing, mocking way, "that you have learned more than I have; you can read and write well, and possess many advantages. For myself, I have had to work hard all my life, from my childhood upwards, and my parents were so poor that they could barely afford to send me to our village school for a few years. Perhaps you might find a more suitable husband; but certainly not a more faithful heart, Susanna; and I think you would never have cause to repent, if you consented to be my wife."

Christian sighed. He felt very uneasy, as Susanna still gave him no answer, but continued to gaze into his eyes as steadily as if she wished to look down into his very heart. Perhaps Susanna did not herself know *what* answer to make. The only child of her parents, and extremely beautiful, of an active, lively spirit, she had been spoiled by them, particularly by her mother. Mrs. Lischke was a most excellent woman, only a little too communicative; and being entirely taken up by the extraordinary and excellent qualities of her daughter, never let an opportunity slip of telling her so; and Susanna had too good a memory, and too great a respect for her mother and for herself to forget this, or even to doubt the truth of these commendations. Christian, on the contrary, whom she liked very much, because he had in every respect been useful and obliging to her, had come on board the ship a peasant boy, and, save his honest heart and steady industry, made no

other pretensions to culture. A village schoolmaster in Germany had been able to flog a little learning into him in his earliest years. Even that school he had only attended until he had reached his eleventh year, when his uncle emigrated, and took him away with him. Immediately after their arrival in Australia this uncle died, and the poor boy was left perfectly alone; and being thrown upon his own resources, of course but little time was left him for study. Susanna had therefore accustomed herself to consider him until now as a sort of subordinate assistant, although he was three years older than herself. She could not realize the notion of this new and mutual position which he had proposed to her; and, indeed, her ambition aimed at something higher than becoming a "joiner's wife." Still, this proposal flattered her vanity, and honest Christian took the unconscious smile that stole over her countenance as a good sign.

"And will you be mine, Susanna?" he said, in a low voice, at the same time trying to take her hand, which she withdrew hastily.

"Have you well considered the responsibilities of housekeeping?" asked Susanna.

"Certainly. Indeed, I have thought of nothing else for the last three years."

"And if I say '*No*'?"

Christian looked at her for a few instants with his honest eyes, and said, sadly—

"Perhaps, Susanna, this would be easy to you; but it would break my heart. If you do not become my wife, for whom in the wide world have I been working and toiling? My mother is dead. I am alone; and it would not have been worth the trouble to do all this for myself only. But you will not say 'No,' Susanna?"

"I will think about it," replied the girl, with a steady and searching gaze. "To speak to you plainly, Christian, I do not think we are suited for each other. I am very wild, and cannot yet quite realize the idea of obeying a husband."

"Susanna!"

"Oh, I know all you are going to say; but it would, after all, be better for you to consider whether you might not find in Adelaide a girl more suited for you."

"Susanna!" exclaimed the poor fellow, in an earnest tone of voice.

"Well, I only wish you to think about it," said she, laughing. "At any rate, we are both of us young, and need be in no hurry. Let us take time at least to consider!"

"And when will you let me have your answer?" asked Christian, very disconsolately, and with hesitation.

"I do not know yet," replied Susanna, considering; "perhaps to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, or on Monday. I will write my answer; but you must not come back until you receive it. Will you promise me this favour?" She held out her hand, which he took and kept in his.

"I promise you, Susey," he said; "but pray do not keep me waiting too long. I know that until I receive your answer, the time will pass heavily enough. If I do try to work, I shall never be able to manage it."

"Good bye, Christian, until then."

"And you are not angry at my proposal, Susey? Indeed I love you so much——"

"Foolish man!" said the girl, laughing; "how should I be angry with you for that? I ought rather to thank you for the confidence you place in me."

"Oh, I wish you would say 'Yes,' Susey; and you will not say 'No,' will you?"

Susanna laughed.

"You are a strange fellow. If I do not say 'No,' I must of course say 'Yes.' Well, I shall send my answer. Good bye, Christian."

"Farewell, Susey. Stop: I should like so much——" He stopped, embarrassed, and looked longingly into her clear blue eyes, which were bent keenly upon him; but he did not venture to say anything else. He once more pressed her hand, turned away, and left the garden. Having mounted his horse, he rode slowly down the road which led to Adelaide, without once looking round.

Susanna remained standing in the garden. A cluster of olive-trees concealed her from the view of those within the house. With her head leaning thoughtfully on her hand, she watched Christian as he rode away. Then she shook her head, and as a sigh escaped from her bosom, said in a low voice, as if speaking to herself—

"No, we two do not suit each other; you are very kind and honest, but—that is all. It is not for this I have learned and studied so much, to be at last the worthy wife of a pea-

sant youth—to help the joiner's 'prentice to boil glue, and stand in the kitchen from morning to evening, and sweep, and wash, and scour. I hope I am destined for something better," she added, in a whisper, drawing figures with her small pretty foot upon the sand. "If father is ever so angry and scolds, I know mother will take my part; and—ha!" she cried, almost aloud, with difficulty suppressing a scream, as suddenly a hand was passed round her waist, and a coaxing voice asked her, most tenderly:

"So lost in thought, my pretty Sue, and so frightened? What were you thinking of, if I may ask?"

"That is just what you may not ask, Mr. Von Pick," said Susanna, trying to free herself from his embrace. "But where do you come from so suddenly? I never heard you approach, and you really frightened me."

I was standing behind the elder-bush," replied the young man, with a laugh; "and if I did not hear what you said, at least I noticed your weighty and earnest conversation with our honest German peasant-boy, my kind landlord. It must have been something very interesting you were settling: perhaps a new clothes-press." He kept looking up and down, as if measuring the trees.

"He asked me to become his wife, Mr. Von Pick," said Susanna, quietly.

"The deuce he did!" cried the young gentleman, with fear. "Indeed I should not have thought the fool so wise."

"He is a good young man, and an honourable one," said the girl, gravely.

"But you have of course refused, Susanna?" asked the young man, anxiously.

"Refused?—on what account?"

"On my account, Susanna," the new wooer said, entreatingly, seeking once more to put his arm round her waist.

"On *your* account?"

"Oh, you know how much I love you; you *must* know that all my plans and aims, since I came to live in this unfortunate Adelaide, have been to gain your father's consent. Your mother regards my cause with favour: you like me yourself."

"How do you know that?" asked Susanna, sharply.

"Love is blind, my darling, but lovers are not," said Von

Pick, laughing. "And I hope you are destined to be something better than the wife of a peasant or a joiner. Will you, at your age, renounce all the claims upon life you are so justly entitled to, and share the lot of the German women, of which you have such horrible examples before your eyes? Will you drive the oxen yoked to the plough up and down the fields for days together; and cook, scour, wash, tend the children, patch and darn, and think yourself lucky if you get your soup in the evening for your day's trouble? Susanna, for God's sake, do not deceive yourself as to your own character! Before the first week was over you would be the most wretched creature under the sun; and, what is worse, would have nobody to blame but yourself."

"Mr. Von Pick," she began, gravely. But the young man interrupted her, and continued:

"Oh! do not call me 'Mister.' Do not let us stand upon mere form."

"Mr. Von Pick," Susanna repeated, quietly, and with strong emphasis, "you draw a picture in which I see my future destiny is but imperfectly sketched. But what else can a poor girl like myself expect? It is woman's lot to attach herself to a man, and place her life in his hands. Happy is she who finds a heart faithful and honest, although it may not possess riches or accomplishments; and can I, in my position, entertain a higher ambition?"

"Certainly you can,—you must," exclaimed the young man, a deep blush stealing over his face. "Will you be my wife, Sue?" said he, pressing her to his heart. "Australia is a country where every enterprising man can make his fortune; and I hope, at least, you will lead a different life with me than you would with the peasant lad."

Susan's face turned scarlet with blushes, and she cast down her eyes without replying. At last she said, in a low voice, without withdrawing from his embrace:

"If I could believe you,—if I knew you were as honourable as that peasant lad, who loves me with all his heart, and would do everything in his power——"

"Dearest, dearest Sue," whispered the young man, impressing a glowing kiss upon the scarcely-resisting lips," can you doubt my sincere and ardent affection? I shall speak to your father this very day; I came for the purpose of asking him to

take a share in an important undertaking, which may lead to fortune, and make us both rich men. May I tell him that you love me, and are willing to be my wife?"

"Father will not consent, I am sure," whispered Susanna, casting a timid glance in the direction of the house, which was entirely concealed by the thick olive copse: "he would be much more likely to give his consent to my marriage with Christian."

"You and your mother will talk him over," urged Pick. "Your mother likes me, and she has long noticed my affection for you."

"I tremble to think what my father will say about it."

"Leave him to me, my dear child," whispered Pick, giving the girl another kiss. "You consent? You will dismiss the peasant lad, and be my good little wife, won't you?"

While saying this, his lips again slowly approached hers. Susanna looked at him for a moment with swimming eyes, received his kiss, and tearing herself from his arms, hastened towards the house.

Oscar Von Pick remained behind. His eyes followed the girl as long as she was within sight; then he sat down upon the bench close by, put one leg over the other, placed his right elbow upon his knee, with his chin upon his hand, whistled a few notes, keeping time with his foot, and at last said, half aloud—

"So far, so good, my dear fellow. A precious pretty girl, sprightly, well-shaped; fresh in mind and body—and the old fellow has some money. But how shall I get married? If the coal speculations were to succeed, and flour were to rise, I should be all right. I have a good many irons in the fire just now. Hang it! why should not a speculative head, without capital, manage to pick a good income out of this mad confusion of Australian life. One only wants sense to manage the business, and to seize the right moment? Still, things run rather contrary. This declaration has come a little too soon. Hem, hem!—The old man is one of the right sort of thick-headed German peasants. These fellows fancy they never can think too much of themselves, because by hard work they have succeeded in knocking the dollars out of the land. They ought all of them to have been oxen; they have no notion of anything but hard work. The blockhead will prove as tough as leather. I know him well. With the old woman

I should get on better. She is a good sort of stupid old woman. Were he to consent to the marriage, and not offer to come down with any cash! However," he continued, dismissing all unpleasant reflections, "this coal business will remedy that. It has come just at the right time. In that we are sure to agree," he added, with a motion as if counting money. "When the peasant gets scent of gain, you may twist him round your finger. At any rate, I have taken the fatal plunge, and must strike out vigorously. The old fellow must be managed, after all!"

He pressed his hat upon his head, and, with his hands crossed behind him, walked up and down until he had finally made up his mind. Then he went, in the direction Susanna had taken, towards the house, which was separated from the garden only by the yard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOTTHELF LISCHKE.

GOTTHELF LISCHKE was a man well to do; and when his neighbours hinted that he had made a good deal of money, he never replied, but merely gave a silent and satisfied smile, as if he knew that their surmises were right. However, although his circumstances improved every year, he never showed it in his manner of living. Whenever his wife urged and tormented him to make a little more show, and at least let people see that they were not obliged to work as they did, he invariably shook his head, and said, with a laugh, "Let them talk, Kate. If we had nothing, they would give us nothing; so I am quite indifferent as to what they may say about us."

As Mrs. Lischke did not by any means entertain the same opinion, she returned to the charge with—"But they *had* it, and ought to do as others did."

"Just because we can and don't," he would reply, "we are constantly advancing quicker than the rest, and they are annoyed at our progress."

It was only when the good dame talked of her "position" (which she did very seldom, and only when unusually vexed) that her husband got angry. "Your *position!*" he would say,

sticking his arms in his sides. "Pray what is your position? You are a peasant's wife,—the wife of the tinker Gotthelf Lischke; neither more nor less!" This usually put a stop to the matter; for Katharine's experience had long taught her that upon this theme her husband, usually kind and forbearing, was apt to be extremely rough.

Mrs. Lischke's character was quite different from that of her husband. Like him, she was industrious, and certainly never neglected her duties; and to her economy and perseverance he had been in a great measure indebted for his rapid progress in Australia. He knew this, and on that account overlooked minor faults. The good dame could not, however, reconcile herself to her husband's extreme simplicity, and she took particular delight in any show of respect paid to her "position." In spite of her good nature and kind-heartedness, the devil of vanity possessed her, and having no other vent for her pride, it was all concentrated upon her only child, her daughter Susanna.

Susanna was,—and she had no need to be told so,—a very pretty girl, in whom Mrs. Lischke saw, as she but too often said, the portraiture of her own maidenhood. The best education that could be obtained in this remote country the girl had received; and as old Lischke never made any objection to it, and always paid his money willingly for such a purpose, she received an education above her station, the consequences of which the old man, rather too late, tried to remedy. The mother, on the contrary, built upon this all her hopes of a happier future; and it may easily be imagined, entertaining these notions, what an influence she exerted over her daughter's mind. The old man, without perceiving it, lost ground rapidly; and although he fancied he was master in his house, the women had for some time got the upper hand.

The interior of Lischke's home was in keeping with his character. Homely and old-fashioned as he was in everything, he had furnished his house on the same principles; and it was in no way different from one of the usual small peasant cottages of Germany. The thatched roof had indeed been replaced by tiles: in other respects, everything was built and arranged in the simplest manner. The furniture was of plain polished wood; the floor scoured clean and strewed with sand; the windows, to the great despair of Mrs. Lischke, were without curtains; and the only object of luxury in the room

was a fine easy-chair, made by Christian for Mrs. Lischke; as for Gotthelf, he sat, morning and night, either upon a form or his wooden stool.

The kitchen utensils, too, were old-fashioned. The plates were of tin, and, thanks to Mrs. Lischke, as bright as silver. The dishes had mostly been made by a German potter residing at Saaldorf; they were adorned with somewhat fantastical flowers and birds, verses from the Bible, and maxims, with questionable orthography and indifferent calligraphy. In short, everything in this small spot reminded the owner of his old home. A green painted parrot of gypsum, brought from Germany, and four or five lithographs, hung against the walls. One of them represented "Doctor Martin Luther;" another, "The Prayer of the Three Monarchs before the Battle of Leipzig;" and the others, "Lutheran Preachers of the Olden Times," but not by any means faithful likenesses.

The workshop was next to this parlour, and it was not a very pleasant addition; the continual knocking and hammering of two workmen and an apprentice resounded in the room, in spite of the intervening door, which was generally kept closed. The women had grown accustomed to it, and Lischke himself maintained that the noise could not be heard.

Mrs. Lischke sat in her arm-chair, spinning, and another female was in the room. The latter, a sempstress, sat at the window, busily engaged plying her work; a little girl of four or five years of age, her daughter, was sitting by her on the floor, playing with a rudely-constructed doll, which she rocked in her arms. This woman had evidently possessed the most dazzling beauty, traces of which might still be discerned in her noble, but thin and pallid features—in her dark eyes, beautiful chestnut hair, and soft complexion. But grief or illness had blanched those cheeks, dimmed the fire of those eyes, and a deep, sorrowful expression about her mouth seemed to have fixed itself there, never to be removed. She was a poor German woman, who lived with her child in a wretched cottage, about half a mile from Lischke's. She earned her livelihood by her needle. Her name was Louisa Hohburg.

Lischke had just entered the room, for on his return from his journey he had gone into the workshop to look after the men. He seemed to be in an extremely good humour, and paced up

and down the small room with hasty strides, his hands crossed over his back.

"Well, Gotthelf, have you made a good bargain to-day?" said his wife. "You look so very pleased."

"Pleased? Yes," replied Lischke, rubbing his hands; "why not? Wheat sold to-day at nine-pound ten; that's a very good price. It fell again; but so much the better for poor people."

"There is something else that pleases you," said his wife, with curiosity, very eager to know what could have made her husband, usually grave enough, so delighted. At that moment the door opened, and Susanna, with flushed cheeks, and trembling with excitement, came in, and as soon as she perceived her father, went towards the door leading into her bed-room.

"Hallo, Susey!" exclaimed her father; "where are you going so fast, child? Come here, and bid your father good day."

"Good day, father," said Susanna, who had recovered herself, shaking him by the hand.

"Good day, child. How very warm you look," said the old man, with a smile. "May I know what it is going on?"

"I ran in from the garden, and very likely got heated. It is very warm to-day."

"Oh, indeed!" replied her father; "and so it made you warm?"

"It?—what?"

"Why, the sunshine," answered old Lischke, laughing; "what else do you suppose I meant?"

"How very queer you are to-day," said Mrs. Lischke to him. "What is the matter with you? Really, I think you have been drinking beer."

"Quite right, child," said Lischke, good humouredly; "and why not? Nothing can be nicer than a glass of the light beer they brew at Adelaide on such a warm day. None of their strong ale and heavy porter for me. But, where has Susey gone to? She is a pretty girl, and becomes more so every day, only one must not let her know it."

"And why not?" said Mrs. Lischke; "do you think she does not know it? Oh, you do not know Susey!"

"It would be better she did not," muttered the good man; "at least for her future husband's sake."

"Future husband!" repeated Mrs. Lischke, with a sigh. "There's time enough to think of that."

"I am not so sure of that," said Lischke, smiling, and rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction. "Queer things happen now and then, and when we least expect it."

"Is Mr. Lischke at home?" a strange voice was at that moment heard asking in the workshop, in a temporary lull of the hammers.

"He is," answered the workman; and some one knocked at the door.

"In a hurry, I see," said Lischke, confidentially, while his wife said, "Come in." When he saw the elegant and handsome person of Von Pick enter, instead of Christian, as the old man expected, he seemed to be somewhat startled.

"Good morning, Mr. Lischke,—good morning, madam! Busy, as usual! I begin to think you would sooner find a bee idle than a woman without occupation!"

With this complimentary address Von Pick entered, and, without taking any notice of the sempstress, made the good wife a natural but respectful bow, and shook hands with Lischke.

"Good day, Mr. Von Pick," said the latter, taking off his cap, and putting it upon the table beside him. "To what do we owe the honour of seeing you to-day?"

"All sorts of things, my dear Mr. Lischke," was the answer; "and I hope something good. If you have time, I should like to have a quarter of an hour's conversation with you."

"Alone?"

"It is business."

"Oh, if that is all," said Lischke, "you may go on. My good wife is accustomed to that sort of thing, and Mrs. Hohburg is almost one of the family."

"Well, not exactly business either," said Von Pick, with embarrassment, casting a side glance at the sempstress. The latter, who perceived that she was in the way, accidentally caught his eye. Without saying a word, she took up her work, led her child by the hand, and left the room.

"I do not know," said Mrs. Lischke, "whether it is a secret that the Baron——"

"Oh, not for you," said Pick, hastily, forcing her to resume her seat; "only I did not like talking about it in the presence of a stranger."

"Indeed!" said Lischke, slowly and emphatically, looking at the young man with astonishment. "It is not a family affair?"

"My dear Mr. Lischke," said he, stepping up to him and laying his hand familiarly on his shoulder, "there are two things I wish to speak to you about. One of them in particular concerns Mrs. Lischke as well as yourself, and I hope you will listen to me patiently. Do you feel disposed, and have you time?"

"If it is something important," replied Lischke, "I must find time, and liking has nothing to do with the matter But pray sit down, Mr. Pick. Now, what have you to communicate?"

"Hem! My dear Mr. Lischke," said Von Pick, undecided with which subject to begin. At last he mustered courage to proceed. "I have something of the greatest importance to communicate to you, naturally under the seal of secrecy."

"Well, I am curious to hear what it is. You have not been killing anybody, I hope?"

"I?—no. It is not a question of any crime, but of a source of gain and wealth."

"Gain and wealth!" exclaimed Lischke, looking with astonishment at the young man, whom he had never given credit for anything of the sort. "Well, you wish to make a rich man of me, Mr. Von Pick?"

"Don't joke, Mr. Lischke; the affair is really of the greatest importance, and not only for us, but for the whole colony. I have discovered a coal-mine."

"Coals!" exclaimed Lischke, receiving the *weighty* communication with indifference. "My dear sir, if that be really true, you will make your fortune in one year, for we want coals almost as much as bread. But—you must not be angry with me—this is not the first time people have imagined something of the sort, and the affair ended in smoke. Plenty of humbug, my good sir!—plenty of humbug!"

"Most people will only believe what they see," answered Von Pick, smiling. "Will you tell me what this is, my dear sir?"

With this he drew from his pocket a paper parcel, and, having opened it, held it before the whitesmith. "What do you call *this*, if I may ask you the question?"

Lischke, without much regard for his fingers, took the piece

of coal out of the paper, examined it carefully and curiously, rubbed it, and tested it with his tongue. Mrs. Lischke also came up, and clasped her hands together in profound astonishment.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed; "it is true, and as good a piece of coal as was ever burnt. Well, you are lucky, Mr. Von Pick. I very heartily wish you success, and long life, and health to enjoy it, and——"

"Ta, ta, ta, ta!" said Lischke, breaking the piece of coal and examining it inside. "Where did you find this?—out on the road, I suppose?"

"No, my dear sir," replied the young man, "not on the road. This coal was found far off, in the interior of the mountains; not by me, but by a poor devil of an Englishman, to whom I made an advance of five pounds for his discovery. We are to carry on the undertaking in partnership. The locality will be kept secret until we have bought the land from Government, and can commence working in safety."

"And why have you brought this to *me?*" asked Lischke.

"Because we want a third partner to buy the land without raising any suspicion. The Governor knows at this moment that coal has been discovered, but he does not know where. If I or my friend were to go to the office to buy that land, they would see through the matter at once; Government would keep the land, and we should have to be content with a few thousand pounds."

"A few thousand pounds," muttered Lischke.

"But if you buy the land," continued Von Pick, "no one will have the least suspicion. With the capital at your disposal, it will be easy for you to commence operations; and the first thing we do will be to astonish the inhabitants of Adelaide with a waggon-load of coals, which we will draw in procession through the streets. The waggon shall be covered with flowers, accompanied by a band, and we, the three happy partners, will follow on horseback, amid the shouts of the people."

"What a lucky discovery!" exclaimed Mrs. Lischke, clapping her hands together. "Well, I only wish you——"

"Now, then, stop with your wishes, will you?" old Lischke interrupted her, pretty roughly; "or, rather, don't begin them. An Englishman discovered the coal, you say?"

"Yes."

"How far from here?"

"About seventy miles from Tanunda."

"You do not know the spot, then?"

"We intend going there some of these days."

"Well, what do you want with me in this business?"

"In the first place, we should be glad for you to accompany us; but then there would be danger of your betraying the share you have in the discovery, and thus you would lose the chance of buying the land for us."

"Hem! What then?" said Lischke, who had a good idea of the principal aim of this conversation.

"We wish to know, my dear sir, whether you would not advance a small capital at a per-centage, which you may fix yourself, if you do not wish to enter as a partner?"

"I thought so," said Lischke, with a nod.

"What enormous profits we could make out of a coal-mine, I need not tell you."

"No, certainly not, if you had but found it," replied Lischke, dryly.

"But, Mr. Lischke——"

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Von Pick," Lischke said, interrupting him; "nearly every six months since I came to Australia, and that's a pretty number of years ago, have I heard of the discovery of a coal-mine. A number of people run about like mad, and talk of shares and 77 per cent., are going to name a committee, and God knows what! and at last, my good sir——Plenty of humbug! The affair dies out. In four weeks it is forgotten, until the same story is heard again of another place."

"But, Mr. Lischke——"

"It is of no use. Just because coals are wanted so much, and because they would prove the greatest blessing for the land, more than all your mines of precious stones, were people to find amethysts and sapphires and brilliants by cartloads,—on that account people run mad upon the subject. A coal-mine may, perhaps, be some day really discovered by some lucky fellow."

"You speak as if we only *imagined* we had discovered the coal-mine in order to cheat you!" said Von Pick, half laughing, half offended.

"Nay, my good sir," replied Lischke, dryly; "I have not the slightest idea that *you* mean to cheat any one; but if

you have given that Englishman five pounds for this piece of coal, then *he* has cheated *you*. That is my opinion on the subject—nothing more nor less."

"I am firmly convinced——"

"That is your business," answered Lischke, interrupting him, "and no concern of mine. Your own money and time you can employ as you list; but, in one word, I will have nothing to do with the affair."

"For God's sake, Lischke!" said his wife, remonstrating.

Lischke paid no attention to her remark. He took his cap off the table, as if he wanted to go away; but suddenly changed his mind, and left it where it was.

"My good Mr. Lischke," said Von Pick, "I cannot blame you for your caution, although it is misplaced in this case. Experience has given you prudence, and perhaps suspicion. If you have no confidence in the undertaking, I should be the last man to endeavour to persuade you to embark in it. However, you will be convinced some day; and I hope shortly to be able to lay before you the proofs of our discovery, when it will still be in your power to join us."

"How very kind the Baron is!" said Mrs. Lischke, who could restrain herself no longer, hoping by a few kind words to make amends for the incivility of her husband. "It is a fortunate thing that there are such kind, good-natured souls in the world, and that all are not such obstinate men as you are, Gotthelf."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Von Pick," said Lischke, "for the confidence you place in me, and I wish, with all my heart, that the Englishman may *not* have taken you in. Well, what was the other favour you had to ask? You mentioned two. Mrs. Hohburg is sitting with her work in the sun, and I should like her to come in again."

"Mr. Lischke," said Von Pick, considerably embarrassed, aware that this was not the most favourable moment to speak of an alliance with his daughter. Having, however, gone so far, he perceived that he could not retreat, so he continued,—"Why, the second affair is much more important still than the first."

"More important still? Well, I am very curious to hear what it can be!"

"It is a matter in which my future happiness is concerned."

"The deuce it is!"

"As well as that of another and dearer being," continued Von Pick, in a low, scarcely audible voice. "It concerns your daughter."

"My daughter?—Susey?" exclaimed both husband and wife, with astonishment, and Mrs. Lischke folded her hands in her lap.

"In one word, Mr. Lischke," said the wooer, launching boldly into his subject, "I have come to ask for the hand of your daughter."

"Gracious goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Lischke, "how very kind of the Baron!" But Lischke looked at her savagely, and said,—

"Never mind her nonsense, Mr. Von Pick; she knows no better."

"But, Lischke——"

"And, as regards your offer," continued the latter, without heeding the interruption, "I am glad you have behaved so straightforward and honourable, and have brought out the matter at once. I will give you my answer in as short and concise a manner."

"Dear sir——"

"My daughter does not suit you."

"But, husband——"

"And you do not suit my daughter," he continued, coolly.

"But, Mr. Lischke——"

"Besides, the girl has some one else in her head, who, if I am not mistaken, spoke to her on the subject this morning. At any rate, he has already asked me for her hand."

"And you never told me a syllable about it!" said his wife, angrily.

"I only heard of it myself a short time since," said Gotthelf, as a sort of apology. "Of course, I intended to consult you."

"But, if your daughter loves me instead of the other?" said Von Pick, greatly annoyed at receiving so cool and flat a refusal from a master tinker.

"If Susanna loves you?" said Lischke, looking at him slyly. "Have you asked the girl about it?"

"I think I have sufficient cause to believe she does," replied the young man, with assurance.

"Indeed!" said Lischke, looking earnestly at him. "And you have, no doubt, told the silly thing all sorts of nonsense. For the old man, a coal-mine, and the girl, a powder-mine! Well, I like that!"

"Mr. Lischke, I can assure you——"

"I tell you what," the whitesmith interrupted him, pretty roughly, and with no very friendly mien, "I have nothing to say against your demand; every one has a right to ask parents for the hand of their daughter. Whether they will give it, is another matter. But to confuse the girl's head first, that won't do. I hope the damage may be repaired," he added, more calmly; "for I may at once tell you that this marriage can never take place."

"But, Gotthelf, for God's sake!"

"Your daughter is eighteen years of age, and has also a word to say in this affair."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the old man. "Such young and inexperienced things know nothing of life, and must rely upon their parents' decision."

"But what have you to say against me?" asked Von Pick, with vexation.

"Against you? Nothing at all," said Lischke, "only I do not wish to give you my daughter for your wife."

"Do you think I am not able to keep her?"

"I do not know," said Lischke, obstinately, "although it does not appear certain. You are a gent. upon town, or what they call it, and speculate on everything that comes in your way, even in the bread we eat. One speculation may succeed, and the next fail; and I should not like to trust my child to such uncertainty."

"But, my family at home——"

"Well, it is on account of your family that I say '*No*,'" Lischke continued. "If you should ever take it into your head to return to Germany, and you were to introduce a master tinker's daughter amongst your high and noble relations, I fancy the wry faces the old women and all the gossips would make, and how they would turn up their noble noses. No; I think my child is too good for such a fate. You would, in the end, be ashamed of such a wife. I know that, in such cases, young people are always ready to vow and protest. But let the matter rest here! You have my answer. This

marriage can and shall never take place; and you will therefore, Mr. Von Pick, be good enough not to come here again."

"Mr. Lischke, you treat me in a manner——"

"Do not take it amiss, Mr. Von Pick. I am much obliged to you for your offer; but, as I have told you, we do not suit each other, and, in this case, you must yourself see that visits could only be embarrassing to us, and render our child unhappy."

"This is really too bad," exclaimed Mrs. Lischke, unable any longer to restrain herself. "Are you not ashamed, Mr. Lischke, to speak to the Baron in such a rude and shameful manner?"

"Katharine!" said Lischke.

"Don't Katharine me! I am a mother, and also responsible for the happiness of my child," she exclaimed; "and, if you choose to spurn it——"

Von Pick perceived that a conjugal reaction had taken place in his favour, of which he thought it would be best to profit at a distance. Besides, he felt very awkward, and fancied this was an extremely favourable moment to withdraw. Without, therefore, waiting until Mrs. Lischke had come to the end of her argument, he took up his hat, and said,—

"I shall leave you now, but not entirely renounce my hopes. Reflect upon my proposal carefully. Speak to your daughter about it, and let me hear your final decision in a few days."

"You have my decision," said Lischke.

"I will not consider it as such," replied Von Pick. "Remember, as Mrs. Lischke very justly observes, it is a question of the future happiness of your only child, and that, at least, requires a little time for consideration. Farewell until then, and be assured that I am not angry at anything you have said, although part of your speech sounded somewhat harsh. Perhaps at some future time you will have a better opinion of me."

He bowed to Mr. and Mrs. Lischke, the former scarcely returning his salutation, and left the room. A scene now commenced between husband and wife that was happily a rare occurrence in their married life. Mrs. Lischke almost invariably yielded to the decided expression of her husband's will. In this case, however, she considered it to be her duty to resist to the utmost the marital authority. Her anger was by no means abated on hearing the name of the husband

destined for Susanna. She had always liked Christian Helling very well; she entertained the highest esteem for his industry and uprightness, but, with the prospect of seeing her darling, her Susanna, become a Lady Baroness, she could not accept his offer.

At last Susanna was sent for. Easily as she could manage her mother, she still feared her father and his inflexible will. Lischke, a kind-hearted man, who would never have thought of forcing upon his daughter a husband whom she did not like, was, by the resistance of his wife, worked into such a passion, that he declared Susanna *should* marry Christian, were it only to escape the wooing of this empty-headed baron. "I would never," he exclaimed, as a conclusive argument, "admit into my family such a high and noble gentleman, without house or home, to squander the little I have gained by the sweat of my brow! Yes, I know;—you women have got the *Baron* in your head, and desire to become a Lady Baroness. I wish your vanity was at the devil, Mrs. Lischke! First he comes to borrow money for his coal swindle; and when he sees that won't do, he asks for my daughter! Let him come here again, and I'll show him the door in good style!"

As usual, Mr. Lischke carried his point, reproached his daughter in the most bitter terms for having given the fellow the shadow of a hope; and he treated his wife in such a manner that she sat down in her arm-chair and had recourse to her last remedy—tears, which, however, entirely failed on this occasion. Lischke then called Mrs. Hohburg into the room, in order to put a stop to the unpleasant family scene, and went to the shop and set to hammering on his anvil with might and main.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STRANGER.

Mrs. Hohburg had resumed her seat by the window, after pacifying her child, which, terrified by the unusual noise in the house, had nestled in her bosom and began to weep bitterly. At last it grew tired, and placed its little head upon its mother's lap and fell asleep. The latter placed it on the hard floor, making

a pillow for it with her shawl. The child slept here as soundly as in its little bed. In ordinary circumstances, Mrs. Lischke, who was extremely fond of the child, would not have suffered this. Her attention was attracted by other matters, and she suddenly left her spinning and retired to her own chamber. She was determined not to see her husband again, who, in her opinion, had done both her and her daughter a great wrong. Susanna also left the room.

An hour had elapsed, and Lischke was still hammering away at his work, making the sparks fly in all directions, while his workmen and apprentice followed the example given by their master, when a stranger passed the house, stopped, and came towards the window at which Mrs. Hohburg was engaged with her needlework. He appeared as if anxious to speak to her; but he altered his mind and went to the workshop, which he entered.

The apprentice noticed the stranger, and told his master of his approach. The whitesmith rose to welcome him, and inquired what he wanted. He was very glad to have the chance of half an hour's conversation with somebody, which would enable him to get rid of unpleasant reflections. The stranger might have business with him; and even if such was not the case, hospitality is practised so generally in Australia, that a visitor is sure to receive a hearty welcome wherever he may present himself.

The stranger now knocking at Lischke's door was an old acquaintance of ours, who had found his way through bush and wilderness to the densely-populated part of Australia: in fact, it was M'Donald. However, as he stepped into Lischke's house, his old friends at Mr. Powell's farm would scarcely have recognised him.

The squatter had been changed into a townsman, and was clad in a respectable dress of dark cloth and patent boots. His long beard had disappeared, the only vestige left being a small, closely-cut whisker. His hair had been cut short, and a pair of light blue spectacles, covering the eye, completed the disguise. He still wore his bush cap—of course he could not carry a hat in his saddle-bag, which, hanging over his left arm, had become pretty empty and light.

"What can I do for you?" asked Lischke, as the stranger, passing through his workshop, entered the house. The white-

smith, at first sight, almost invariably disliked fashionable people.

"You are a German, are you not?" M'Donald replied, in tolerably pure German.

"Yes, certainly," replied Lischke, somewhat surprised; "but *you* are not, I believe?"

"Yes, I am," replied the stranger, with a smile. "A residence of many years in England and France has, perhaps, given my pronunciation something which may strike you as foreign. Allow me, nevertheless, to greet you as a countryman; and permit me, as a stranger, to ask you some questions about this place!"

"With all my heart!" replied Lischke, shaking him by the hand. "But be so kind as to walk in." Without waiting for his answer, he untied his green apron, wiped his hands upon it, and once more invited his guest to follow him into the room.

M'Donald obeyed, and entered the apartment, at the window of which he had seen the sempstress, whom he saluted respectfully.

"Where do you come from?" Lischke asked, giving his guest a chair and taking one himself. "Pray make yourself at home, and put your bag down. It is warm to-day, and rather fatiguing travelling. For my part, I would rather sit the whole day at the anvil than be one hour in the saddle."

"I have come on foot," said M'Donald; "and a pretty long way too."

"On foot! that is worse still; but only from Adelaide, I suppose?"

"Quite another direction—from Melbourne, sir," answered M'Donald.

"From Melbourne on foot!" exclaimed old Lischke, with astonishment, casting a somewhat suspicious glance at the dusty but neat boots of the stranger.

"No," replied the latter; "that would be too much of a good thing; I have only walked about ten or twelve miles. My horse was bitten by a black snake, and died in spite of all my efforts."

"Well, that is a sad affair, "said Lischke; "then you were compelled to finish your journey on foot?"

"What could I do? When people see you *must* have a

horse, the price rises in proportion, and here I shall have plenty of opportunities for getting one."

"You are perfectly right," said Lischke; "but after such a walk you must be hungry, and ——"

"Not hungry," said M'Donald, as Lischke was rising; "but may I ask you for a glass of milk?"

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure. As the women-folk are all away, Mrs. Hohburg, would you be so kind as to get a glass of milk?"

The woman rose and left the room to do as she was requested. On hearing her name mentioned, the stranger looked up hastily, and gazed for a few moments at her slender, sickly form.

"Did you say Hohburg?" he asked his host. "Who is this lady?"

"Lady?" said Lischke, with an expression of pity: "she is a poor woman living in the neighbourhood. She earns a scanty livelihood by going out to work. She is married, but her husband is a rascal. He left her suddenly, and went no one knows where, perhaps to California, or some other distant land. Now she is left alone here, and leads a miserable life; but she behaves so nobly, that we are all glad to assist her whenever we can. She will not accept of charity, and so we give her work, that she may at least have something to support herself."

"Poor woman!"

"Yes, dear sir, this is a sad thing for a person in Australia," said Lischke, who in the preceding family scene found rich matter for this reflection. "A woman who has a worthless husband *here* is lost, and might as well throw herself into the water. I don't know whether it is in the air, or something else; but people here will drink, and when they have once begun, poverty comes at a rapid pace. And what good can it do them, after all, I should like to know? At home, a man may get a little too much now and then, and sleep it off; the next morning, when he considers the matter, he finds it has cost him a few dollars, and there is an end of it. But here they throw money away by handfuls: everything they have goes for wretched brandy which I would not even pour down my sleeve. Drink has been the ruin of this man, who was once very respectable, and could talk very learnedly. His hands were white as a woman's, but he could drink like

a brace of dragoons. Yes, a man out here who has a daughter must be careful to find her a decent and honest husband, or else it will be a bad job, and the devil will get into the house."

"You are married, I suppose?"

"Yes, I should think so," replied Lischke, laughing. "A farmer would lead a wretched life here without a wife. It is not always very bright. Are you a bachelor?"

"Yes."

"And have come from Melbourne through the bush?" repeated Lischke, who had not yet got over his astonishment. "Bless my heart, it must be a long and tedious way! I believe there have been some skirmishes in New South Wales lately, between bushrangers and blacks! Did you hear anything about it?"

"Yes, I heard something of the affair," replied the stranger; "but, you know, such things are usually very much exaggerated: a mouse becomes an elephant in no time."

"Yes, there you are right," said Lischke, with a laugh, thinking of Mr. Von Pick. "There is plenty of puffing here, too: it grows as thick and high as gum-trees. There is your milk; pray, Mrs. Hohburg, be so kind as to bring a little bread and butter; cold milk is not very good by itself."

"I am sorry to give you so much trouble."

"Nonsense," said Lischke; "I can't see any trouble in giving one's guest a little bread and milk; it is the very least one can do for him. Thank you, Mrs. Hohburg; just be so kind as to put it upon the table.—You can help yourself, and I wish you a good appetite."

At the mention of the name, the stranger again examined the countenance of the woman, now turned towards him; but she resumed her work.

"May I ask your name?" said Lischke, at last, after watching with great pleasure the stranger's enjoyment of his simple meal. "Mine is Lischke, and I am a whitesmith."

"My name is Schreiber," replied M'Donald.

"I took you at first for a squatter," said Lischke. "You look very much like an Englishman, but you are not a squatter?"

"No, I once had the intention of settling somewhere; and if I find a suitable place, I may do so yet."

"The best thing in the world for a man to do," said Lischke,

"The land about here is not the *most* fertile; but it produces very good crops, and an industrious man will always make it answer. Do you wish to hire land?"

"I suppose you hire land yourself, here?"

"I did formerly; but, thank God, I now cultivate my own land. Farming hired land is very well when you cannot do better. The large English land-owners are very glad to take us. We do their work for them; till and manure the ground as it should be done; and when we have had it in our hands awhile, it is worth four times as much as before. These gentlemen know this; and many, as for instance the wealthy Angas, only take Germans on their land."

"Do you agree well with the English landowners?"

"Why not? Both find their advantages; and where this is the case people always agree. There are, of course, many who abuse them; and they would be right in so doing, if they were not also themselves to blame. There is Ludley, for instance, has just seized the goods of two Germans, who, in the passage-contract they made in Germany, rendered themselves responsible, like the rest, for the passage-money of the whole ship's company. The emigration agents make the poor devils believe all sorts of things, particularly in the contracts, by which they bind themselves to work *here* for their passage out, and get them to sign that they will be answerable each for all, and all for each. Then, when they consider the consequences of the contract, they look aghast, and complain of injustice. Serves them right; if they have no sense, it must be beaten into them. They have no business to sign anything of which they do not know the meaning. Of course, honest men usually get off the worst. Then, there are people in Australia, who, for a few shillings, play into the hands of the emigration agents: they write enthusiastic letters home about what a paradise Australia is,—how well the Germans are received here, and so on. The stupid clod-hoppers at home think of course what they see in black-and-white must be true, form exaggerated notions of the country, and, in short, are not satisfied, let them be ever so well off."

Lischke had got quite warm upon his subject, and the stranger let him run on while he finished his meal. It was evident he took but little interest in the question concerning the Germans; but this gave him so much more time for reflection. His thoughts carried him to other scenes, and

the question with which he interrupted his talkative host showed how little attention he had paid to his speech.

"Do you know whether there are many ships in the port of Adelaide ready to sail?"

"Ships?"—startled by the suddenness of his unexpected question, and not able at once to answer it—"well, indeed, I do not know. We hear very little of that here, nor do we care about it, except when some German ship comes in with immigrants and letters from home."

"But you ship your products?"

"The merchants do that, when anything does get shipped. We sell almost everything to brokers: it is more convenient. They come to our place for whatever we have, and we have no further trouble."

"Shall I be able to get any information on this point in the neighbourhood?"

"About ships? Oh, yes. Dr. Spiegel takes in the paper, with an account of all the ships which arrive or depart, and when they sail, and what they are laden with."

"And where does he live?"

"Close at hand. But, if you are going to Adelaide, you will soon get the information. There you will find the papers in every tavern."

"And do you take in no paper at all—not even a German one?" asked the stranger. "I believe there are two or three papers published at Adelaide."

"I believe there are," said Lischke, leaning back in his chair; "but they contain very little worth reading. There is seldom anything sensible in them; and as for politics, I have long ceased troubling myself about them."

"Yet," said M'Donald, "it is necessary to know something about what is going on, if that be only the names of the members to be returned for the Legislature."

"Pooh!" said the German; "I never vote. The English may do what they choose. I pay my taxes, and that's enough. I don't want to have anything to do with the rest. Vote! Yes, to knock about the whole day, and swill and shout, and carry flags, and all that sort of nonsense. If they stayed at home at their work, it would be more sensible."

"Still, such things must be," replied the stranger, who could not help comparing in his mind the excitement of former electioneering times with the imperturbable tranquillity

of the honest German. "Who is to attend to these matters, if those interested in them will not trouble themselves about them?"

"The Government," said Lischke, with a look, as if by that single word he had solved the whole problem of state-craft; "what are they for?—why do we pay our taxes? I have not come to Australia for that purpose—not I. I want to be at peace here. We found to our cost, in Germany, what these things produce. A man often writes his name on a bill without knowing what it is. Let them catch Lischke at anything of the sort if they can, that's all. I burnt my fingers once, and shall not do so again. But why do you inquire about ships? Do you want to leave Australia?"

"No," said M'Donald, not deeming it advisable to acknowledge his intention. "On my way I bought a lot of skins of Australian birds, and I should like to send them to Germany before they are spoiled by insects."

"Oh, then you are a sort of Naturalist, as they call it, I think," said Lischke, "who store up bags full of weeds and skins of birds, and arrange them in cases. You would find one kindred spirit in Saaldorf, who kills every bird he can catch, and then offers them for sale."

"Indeed," said M'Donald, with a smile; "although I have always taken great interest in the animal kingdom of Australia, it has been a secondary matter with me. I am a doctor by profession."

"A doctor!" shouted Lischke, starting from his chair. "Then you must stay here; we want a doctor very badly. It would be just the thing if we could get a good doctor in the place, and you look as if you understood your profession."

"Have you no doctor in Saaldorf?" said M'Donald, perceiving a prospect opening out to him which offered, if not a permanent sojourn, at least a home where he could await the favourable moment to escape from Australia.

"We are in a worse condition than if we had none," said Lischke. "There is, indeed, a young puppy, who never finished his studies; and he sports long spurs and talks very big of his 'cures.' I am always annoyed to see him, and am frightened to death to think what will happen in case any of us should fall ill."

"Is there a chemist here?"

"I should think so, and a right good one too; but no one to

write prescriptions excepting this empty-headed Jack. No, doctor; if you have any notion of staying in South Australia, then, by all means, settle at Saaldorf, and you will not have occasion to repent of taking this step. The people here are a very good set, mostly settlers; and there is money in the place, you may rely upon it. Besides, you will find very good society, and as honest people as you could wish."

"You point out very alluring prospects, my dear sir," said M'Donald.

"But not better than I can answer for," replied the other. "If old Lischke tells you anything, you may depend upon it. I am not one of those who see everything in a false light."

"Oh, I believe you," replied M'Donald; "but when a doctor wishes to settle at a strange place, he has greater difficulties to overcome than any one else. A workman may establish himself by showing his skill; a tradesman by his merchandize; but the principal thing with a physician is confidence; and if he cannot acquire that he will never succeed, even if he were the most skilful man upon earth."

"You are quite right; but that is just what the other gent cannot obtain, and which you will and must soon acquire."

"I should first have to make inquiries, see the chemist, and learn more particulars from him."

"I will tell you something," said Lischke, striking his hand upon the table. "I have an idea, and if you agree to it you will do me a favour. Stay with me a few days. I have a spare room, and you will not cause us the slightest inconvenience. In the meantime you can look about, and I know the place will suit you."

"The invitation, my dear sir, is somewhat incautious. What if I took you at your word?"

"Done, then," said Lischke, extending his hand towards him.

"Well then, done! I shall avail myself of your hospitality for a few days," answered M'Donald, with some hesitation; "and I really think that I shall like my new position."

"That's right," said Lischke, rubbing his hands; "and now it is to be hoped we shall settle that puppy of a doctor, whatever his name may be."

Lischke was delighted. Always hospitable towards strangers, particularly to his own countrymen, this visit was moreover remarkably well-timed. Although he knew per-

fectly well that, when he had once decided upon a certain course, obedience followed as a natural consequence, and had no fear of seeing his decision disputed, still he was glad to have a stranger about him, in whose presence his wife could not allude to the unpleasant, and, as he considered, settled transaction. After a few days, he hoped she would have considered the matter, and all difficulties would then disappear.

"By the way, how long is it since you left Germany?" he asked suddenly, as he was about to rise from his stool.

"Only a few years."

"So much the better; it is long since I saw any one I could talk a sensible word with; and I hope you will let me know all about Germany. Now make yourself at home, and afterwards——"

"But I should first of all like," said M'Donald, interrupting him, "to learn something about the sailing of the ships, that I may not miss the opportunity of shipping my things off when they arrive. I should also like to obtain the address of a broker, to whom I might consign them."

"Yes, yes, about your bird-skins," said Lischke. "Well, I can tell you what to do. Go at once to Dr. Spiegel, and arrange with him. He is a very kind and obliging man, although he may have a few absurd notions in his head. In the meantime my girl will set your room to rights, and—— but, bless my heart," he said, suddenly, "where can she be all the time? Mrs. Hohburg, have you seen Susanna?"

"She went into the garden some time ago."

"Into the garden? I hope she is not——" but he quitted the room without finishing the sentence, leaving the stranger and Mrs. Hohburg alone.

"The name of Hohburg" said the guest, after a short silence, "awakens in me old, dear, and painful recollections. From what part of Germany do you come, if I may ask that question?"

"I?" said the woman, with a deep blush, but without looking up from her work; "from—Thüringen."

"Then I was mistaken; I do not know that part; I was, however, struck with the name. It is wonderful how a single word, a mere sound, can sometimes bring back to our minds scenes of our youth, and endow old and long-forgotten images with all their freshness, life, and splendour. Happy

is he whose path of life they illumine, and do not throw their dark and gloomy shadows across it!"

"Happy indeed!" said the woman, in a low and scarcely audible voice.

M'Donald rested his head upon his hand, and gazed intently into vacancy, as if lost in a dream. Occasionally, however, he would cast a searching glance at the woman. At last, Lischke returned, and pointed out the way to Dr. Spiegel's, urging him to go at once, so as to be back before dark; and then he returned to his own work, satisfied both with himself and with what he had done. He felt he had done what was proper in expelling the unwelcome son-in-law, and that was sufficient. Christian, on the contrary, was the right sort of husband for his daughter, and now that he had moreover found a lightning-conductor for unpleasant scenes, he was in a particularly cheerful humour.

Susanna thought very differently of Von Pick. Until this period she had yielded an implicit obedience to the rather severe commands of her father; but now that he wished to dispose despotically of the happiness of her future life, she considered the moment had come for her to think about acting for herself. To think over a plan for this purpose, in which she knew that her mother would support her, she retired into the garden, immediately after the violent scene with her father, in the utmost excitement. She had scarcely sat down on the bench by the olive-hedge, where Oscar had that very day asked for her hand, when she heard steps near her, and her lover stood before her.

"In heaven's name, what are you doing here?" she exclaimed, with fear. "If father were to find you, in his present state of mind, there is no telling what he might not do. You do not know in what a fearful rage he can get."

"Do not fear on my account," replied the young man, drawing her towards him, and not meeting with any resistance; "what harm can he do me after this fearful blow, which has destroyed all my hopes!"

"You will spoil everything," said Susanna, trying to free herself from his embrace. "Oh, leave me; my heart is broken, and I neither know what to do nor what to think."

"And will you yield to the despotic will of your father

Can he force you into a marriage which is repugnant to your heart?"

"No—no, no!" exclaimed Susanna, in the greatest excitement, and bursting into tears. "I hate this Christian—I hate him; and rather than become his wife, I would throw myself into the water!"

"There will be no need of doing that, my darling," said Von Pick, trying to calm her. Wounded by the rough treatment of the old man, he was now firmly resolved upon marrying his daughter, if it were only to spite him. "According to our laws," he continued, "he cannot force you, and I shall stand by you. Wait a short time. In a few months, perhaps weeks, or even in a few days, I shall be in a position to offer you a comfortable and happy home. If your father, then, will force us to extremities, he will have no one to blame but himself. I cannot live without you; the mere thought drives me mad; and we will not see the happiness of our lives sacrificed to the whim of an obstinate old man."

"But what can we do?"

"You can leave your father's house with me," said Von Pick, firmly. "We shall soon find a clergyman to marry us; and if we are once married, his rage will not separate us; and when he sees you are happy, he will calm himself."

"I should die with shame," said Susanna: "after all, he is my father."

"But, does he act like a father towards you?" said Von Pick. "However, it has not come to that yet; perhaps it may all turn out well, and we must try to gain time."

"I must go in; father will miss me," said Susanna, casting a timid glance towards the hedge. "I should be lost if he found me with you."

"Then appoint a place where we may meet," said Von Pick. "We must speak to each other; our happiness depends upon this. Take an hour to consider the matter."

"My head turns, and I cannot form an idea," said Susanna, plaintively.

"Let me think for you then, Susan. You can in some way or other write me a few words to-morrow, telling me where to meet you."

"No, that will not do; father would be sure to find me out. There is no one by whom I could send the letter. But I have to write to Christian to-morrow, to invite him to come

to our house, and settle about the marriage. I would rather die than do it."

"That is excellent," exclaimed Von Pick. "If Christian were not to hear that I am his rival!"

"Father strongly recommended mother not to mention anything about you to him."

"Excellent," said the young man, laughing.

"But I cannot see——"

"The thing is very simple," replied Von Pick, still laughing. "Christian and I live in the same house, as you know, or rather I am his lodger. The stupid fellow can scarcely read a word, and as for writing himself, he knows no more about it than a cow. I carry on all his correspondence, and whenever he receives a letter, which is not more than three times a year, or has to read a written order, he invariably comes to me to decipher the same."

"But of what use is that to me, if I am compelled to write to him?"

"I shall get the letter, and you have nothing to do but to give me the necessary hint. Perhaps you may do this by some sentence which we may agree upon beforehand. But if that will not do, manage it in such a manner that the first word in each line is for me. You write so well that this will be a mere trifle for you. You can in that case write anything your father wants. You may, if you like, promise to marry him; only gain time."

"And if he takes me at my word?"

"Do not fear. Before the time elapses everything will have taken another turn, and we can kill two birds with one stone. We deceive your father, who seeks to exercise an undue authority over his child, and at the same time we punish this impudent clodhopper, who thinks himself good enough for you."

Susanna's eyes sparkled. She understood perfectly what her lover required, and the romantic nature of the perhaps scarcely necessary stratagem induced her to embrace it at once. Still she thought of poor Christian, who certainly loved her with all his heart; and questioned whether it was right to treat him in so cruel a manner?

"But if Christian should learn afterwards that I was only making fun of him," she said, in a low voice, "he will perhaps take it to heart."

"Yes," said Pick, laughing, "and he will get drunk at the next tavern, and a night's sleep will cure him both of his love and his intoxication. My dear child, these coarse, uneducated people have no conception of real love, for the feeling of which a certain degree of culture is always necessary. What these people call love is more or less related to their material well-being. If they succeed, so much the better; if not, they try elsewhere. In such a marriage the dowry always acts the principal part; and when they do not find it sufficient in one family, they go to another. Then, my darling, you will write, and I shall so arrange Christian's answer that the first words of the lines will inform you of what I have to say. Only manage to find time and opportunity for us to complete our plans as soon as possible."

"I tremble all over when I think of the consequences," whispered Susanna. "Oh! Mr. Von Pick, I had far rather you would not do this."

"We shall laugh some day when we think of the affair; it is a conflict between sense and stupidity. But there is one more favour I have to ask you—do not call me 'sir.' Ought we, who are destined to be companions through life, to be so distant? You must call me Oscar in future; won't you?"

"Susanna!" in the tones of her father's voice, at that moment resounded from the house, and the two young people heard a door slam. Mr. Von Pick thought it was high time to depart, as he did not wish to meet old Lischke just then. Hastily kissing Susan's lips, he glided through the bushes like a serpent, running along a hedge of geraniums, behind which he disappeared.

CHAPTER XX.

DOCTOR SPIEGEL.

At a short distance from Lischke's, as the worthy man had said, and on the road to Adelaide, lived Dr. Spiegel, who, several years before, had come from Germany with his wife and mother. There was something else he brought over, which he would have done far better to have left behind, *i.e.*, a too-poetical idea of the distant country. The German sense

of the beautiful filled his head, and, unable to realize the creations of his imagination among the ungrateful generation of his own country, he sought a new sphere of action in the the still young and blooming Australia. Every year a considerable number of such enthusiasts emigrate from Europe, but particularly from Germany, and the fate of their predecessors in misfortune is no warning to them, for the very reason that they consider *their* ideas alone correct, and naturally condemn all others without hesitation.

Dr. Spiegel belonged to the better sort, perhaps to the best, of his class. Making due allowance for his dreams, he was a most estimable, honest man, a good husband and son. He possessed many other good qualities; and if he had been content to write his theories and print them, his weakness would not have been so apparent. His fault consisted in trying to put them into practice—a test which, indeed, very few theories will stand.

Dr. Spiegel commenced life in Australia by laying out the greater part of the capital he had brought with him in land and sheep, with the avowed purpose—of which he made no secret—of showing the squatters how to rear sheep. In this he followed the maxims of the very comprehensive work he had himself written on agriculture and sheep-breeding; and, somehow or other, numbers of his sheep died; his land produced no crops; in fact, scarcely half as much as that of his neighbours. At last Spiegel resolved—a thing he should have done at first—to let the land and the sheep to a good farmer, and he went, with his family, to reside in town.

Unfortunately, he took it into his head to understand by a "good farmer" a man who would after all realize *his* ideas, and bring his books into credit. To this absurd mania the remnant of the poor flock was sacrificed, and the land itself reduced to so bad a state, that the farmer not only could not pay his rent, but had moreover borrowed money of him.

However, Dr. Spiegel was not the kind of man to relinquish hope so soon; and he went on from year to year looking forward to an improvement in his finances. In the meantime his circumstances got worse; and although he always foretold a sudden change of fortune, the long-looked-for moment did not seem likely to appear.

Torn away from the most agreeable society and position in Germany, his wife, Bertha, followed her husband out of pure

love. Although endowed with great shrewdness, which enabled her to perceive that her husband's plans could not all be carried out, still she expected better results from time and his experience than those which actually occurred. She did not share the enthusiasm of her husband; and it was not long before she foresaw what would be the end of all those useless experiments. In fact, she had the intelligence to foresee that which her better half either would or could not perceive—that they were slowly approaching a gloomy future; and the anxiety of this undermined her health. Can the reader wonder then that she should, under such circumstances, feel homesick, and long for the quiet, secure life of her native country?

Her mother-in-law was the very opposite. Devotedly fond of her son, she followed his waking dreams with blind confidence. In her idea, the world must at last listen to reason; and who but Emilius would have the credit of it—who would reap greater advantages than he? To the fears of her daughter-in-law she opposed a smiling confidence, and Bertha had too kind a heart to think of enlightening her on the subject and disclosing the real canker of her own existence. Bertha's health suffered more and more under this continual agitation. Being naturally of a delicate constitution, and obliged to suffer privations which she had never known before, her strength gradually decreased, and she frequently had to make a violent effort to perform all the household occupations which devolved upon her, for they had lately been obliged to dismiss their servant.

As for Spiegel's professional practice as a lawyer, it was anything but encouraging. He was by no means sufficiently acquainted with the English language to plead and to conduct the affairs of his clients as he might perhaps have done in his mother tongue. He lost one cause after another, until at last his countrymen employed English lawyers, and could no longer be persuaded that it was a shame to have their German concerns settled in the English language. There was not, after all, much to be made out of the practice, even if Spiegel had applied all his energies to it; and so literature became his principal occupation. He maintained, and his mother fully agreed with him, that the mind of man must be completely ruined if it occupied itself solely with material concerns. The mind, too, required nourishment; and, since

God had given him the "talent," it was but right to put it out to interest. Accordingly he commenced a novel, in which his theories were to have full justice done to them; and although he felt considerable difficulty about the materials, and had not yet made up his mind as to the plot, still he had little doubt of obtaining a favourable result.

Mr. Von Pick, finding the practical Lischke would have nothing to do with him, chose this man; and certainly the choice was not bad, as regards his own plans. Pick's eloquence was not misplaced here; he could give his imagination full play, and be sure to be understood. Upon leaving Susanna, he went, therefore, to Dr. Spiegel, and, in a short but animated conversation, made him acquainted with his prospects and plans. Of course he did not say a word about Lischke's refusing to listen to him, nor did Spiegel even think of doubting the possibility of the discovery.

Coals! Here was a prospect of sudden gain—a romantic discovery, which, provided with his hammer, he had himself previously pursued in the mountains, although without results. It is the firm conviction of almost all the inhabitants of South Australia, that this land, so rich in minerals, and particularly in coal-mines in the north, must naturally possess some in the south. To Spiegel this discovery offered three great advantages: first, and this was the principal point, by a very small outlay—Von Pick had only asked him for an advance of 10*l*.—he was certain to obtain great gains; secondly, the honour of the discovery redounded also to his credit, as a partner, particularly as in his last publication he had demonstrated the fact theoretically; thirdly and lastly, the mysterious features of the undertaking offered him splendid and very desirable materials for his novel. What more could he desire?

When Spiegel expressed his intention of communicating the discovery to his wife and mother, Pick requested him not to do this, on the plea that as few people as possible should know the secret. However, Spiegel had good reasons to insist upon it. First, he wished to communicate these joyful prospects to his wife, who had been of late very sickly and low-spirited; and then, she had in her keeping the money which Von Pick required for the first necessary outlay.

Von Pick passed in the colony for a man with a good income, who, although not making much money in Australia,

received large sums from home. His father, or uncle, was said to fill one of the highest posts at ——, and to be extremely rich; in fact, Von Pick made no mystery of this himself. For the present, he was, as he confessed, without ready cash, as certain cheques would not be due for a month. It was not advisable to put off the undertaking so long, particularly as the discovery was already talked about more than was perhaps convenient. Some one else might easily get upon the track, and snatch from under their very noses the honour and reward of the discovery. Spiegel saw this very clearly, but his wife did not.

He had joined her in her room to acquaint her with his plans and prospects, and Bertha experienced a peculiar feeling of dread when he mentioned his connexion with "Lieutenant Von Pick."

"For God's sake, Emilius, have nothing to do with this man!" she said. "You know what reports are already circulated about him in the town; and although men often speak worse of their neighbours than they are justified in doing, still there is always something in such reports."

"My dear child," replied the doctor, very decidedly, "Lieutenant, or Mr. Von Pick, is a highly *genial* spirit, and men of this sort are always spited by the common herd. I know very well what they say of me, too; but we cannot pay any attention to their scandal. We have now the prospect of obtaining wealth by laying out a few wretched pounds, and would you miss the opportunity? We should regret it ever afterwards."

"A few 'wretched pounds,' Emilius?" his wife answered, in a low, tremulous voice. "Are you aware that all we had has shrunk down to little more than these few pounds?"

"All? You are dreaming, my child. Have I not the land and the house?"

"Yes, there are still the twenty acres of land; but if we continue to live, as we have done hitherto, on the capital, how long will it, how long *can* it last?"

"But the coal-mine, my dear?"

"Good God, Emilius! when will you wake from such dreams?" said Bertha. "But, if you *will* make the trial, if you *believe* what this Von Pick tells you, well then, go with him—that will not cost so very much—and examine into the state of affairs yourself; but give him no money. He is

nothing but an agent—a broker, who runs from one merchant to another, and buys and sells for other people. Any business that offers itself to him suits him, and I fear, too, any means."

"You wrong him very much," said Spiegel, "and just at a time when we are on the point of obtaining permanent competence through his interest. But, however that may be, I have given him my word, and must keep it."

"And how much have you promised him?"

"Ten pounds."

"It is half the ready money we have in the house," said his wife, going to the drawer where the hoard was kept. "The rent for your land is due for three years, and the land has, moreover, as Lischke but lately told us, become worthless. Your flock has been destroyed; the dray-bullocks have, through the carelessness of the farmer, gone astray, and are now in other people's property, and cannot be redeemed, because more is asked for their keep than the beasts are worth."

"Well, now, these are *countrymen*," exclaimed Spiegel, annoyed with the enumeration of all these mishaps—"these are *Germans!* Cannibals would behave better to each other. But wait, I shall pay them out. I will gibbet them in my novel; the whole world shall point at them, and say,—These are so-and-so—these have done so-and so!"

Mrs. Spiegel sighed. There were many things of which she wished to speak to her husband, but talking fatigued her. Her chest pained her, and, with a sad look, she gave her husband the sum he required.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, drawing her towards him, and giving her a kiss; "but do not look so sad. You give way far too much to gloomy thoughts, and there is, indeed, no necessity for this. Am I not doing everything I can to restore our affairs? Am I not speculating in all directions? Have I not always four or five irons in the fire?"

"Yes, my dear Emilius," she said, in a low and tender voice, "you are active; no one can say the contrary, without doing you an injustice; but what I fear is, that you do not use the right means to get on. You are too much given to illusions; you are not practical."

"Practical—practical," said Dr. Spiegel, shaking his head, "that everlasting, tiresome word, with which you have so often

vexed me, Bertha. Practical people always require patient, homely activity; and you seem to be as bad as the rest. Pray what would become of us, if we all thought thus; and if there were not some who clung to the ideal? We should either be absorbed in the slime of every-day life, or become a set of machines, merely to make bread. No, my dear; let me go my way; I am conscious of a higher aim; and this coal business shows you that I do not entirely lose sight of the *material* either; that I sacrifice to it at least part of my strength. Coals, you will not deny, are a very material object. But there is a visitor, my dear," said he, glad to change the subject of conversation, as he caught sight of a stranger advancing towards the house. "Perhaps a new client," he added, with a smile. "Nothing, good or bad, ever comes alone. Now, look whether I am not right. Perhaps a new, happy era will commence to-day, and you will, at some future period, repent of your unfavourable opinion of Mr. Von Pick."

"I would fain hope I may," replied his wife, with a sigh. Her husband left the room to take the money to Mr. Von Pick, and to see what the stranger wanted. The lady remained in the room, sat down on the easy-chair, which reminded her of better times, leaned her head upon her hand, and was soon absorbed in sad reflections. She scarcely felt the big, heavy tears following in quick succession down her pale cheeks.

M'Donald had in the meantime reached Dr. Spiegel's house, whose name he saw in porcelain letters upon the door. On his way he had effected a slight change in his appearance; for in passing by a hatter's, he had exchanged his bush cap for one of the usual cylindrical hats. There was now nothing peculiar in his dress to render him different from a townsman. His step, too, had become light and elastic. For the first time for several months, he felt at least in partial safety. Here, in the midst of Germans, for one of whose countrymen he might pass on account of his knowledge of their language, he scarcely need fear discovery, even if his pursuers had followed his tracks so far. Moreover, he was near the sea, and he fully resolved to leave Australia, if possible on board a German vessel, and take up his abode in Germany. As long as he was in Australia he could never reckon on perfect security, even in the

most distant bush. The last occurrence had been a warning to him, and he was resolved not again to expose himself to the horrors of an Australian prison. He felt that he could not bear this continual agitation, the continual dread of discovery, the continual danger of being recognised and apprehended. He wished to put an end to such a state of affairs as quickly as possible; he wished to preserve the freedom he had gained at the risk of his life. He never could feel himself in safety until, out on the ocean, he might see Australia —which to him was nothing but a vast prison—disappear in the distance behind the blue horizon.

According to custom, after a knock at the door, M'Donald at once entered the house, and went into the lower room, where Mr. Von Pick was holding a very interesting conversation with old Mrs. Spiegel, and gaining every minute in her good graces. How could it be otherwise? He spoke of the eminent talents and abilities of her Emilius, of the energy of his character, his turn for business. He lamented, as she did herself, that Government should hitherto have been so blind as not to pay due attention to his sensible and practical improvements in agriculture and cattle-breeding, although he knew, from a most reliable source, that the governor had on various occasions followed his theories. He represented that this, of course, had not been done openly; they would not acknowledge any obligation to him, the improvements were not to come from a *German:* in short, their conduct was very discreditable.

Von Pick expressed Mrs. Spiegel's inmost thoughts. Such sound judgment—such knowledge of men! How fortunate, she thought, it was for her son to have such friends! The visit was really a great relief to her mind!

"I am afraid I am disturbing you," said M'Donald, entering the room, and bowing to them; "and I have, moreover, a favour to ask of you. Have I the pleasure of speaking to Dr. ——"

"My son will be here immediately," said the matron. "This gentleman is a friend of my son's, the Baron Von Pick. Whom have I the pleasure——"

"Schreiber; my name is Dr. Schreiber; I am a physician——"

"I suppose you wish to settle here, Doctor?" said the matron. "But pray be seated."

"That depends upon circumstances," replied the stranger. "In fact, I wish——"

The door opened at this moment, and in came Dr. Spiegel. I have not yet introduced him to the reader.

The most striking feature of his attire was a long dressing-gown of sky-blue velveteen, fastened round the waist with a dark blue-and-white string, the colour of the student's club he had formerly belonged to: the tassels of his long pipe also gloried in these colours. Upon his feet he wore red embroidered slippers. His head was bare, and his open, honest features always produced an agreeable impression. His hair was fair and curly, and he wore a small and becoming moustache. His eyes were blue—almost too light, and he used spectacles.

He received the stranger in the kindest manner; and M'Donald, introducing himself as Dr. Schreiber, spoke, without loss of time, of his wish to see the German or English newspaper, in order to ascertain the time of departure of the various ships.

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear sir," replied Dr. Spiegel, taking him by the arm. "Pray sit down a moment; I shall be with you immediately."

It was no new client, after all, it seemed; but the natural kindness of Dr. Spiegel's nature was by no means ruffled by this disappointment, and turning to Von Pick, he stepped aside with him, and, giving him the money, said—

"Here, my dear friend, is what you want. I hope it will be the first grain of seed we scatter to reap a good harvest."

"It would be rather expensive seed," said Von Pick, laughing, and putting the bank-note into his pocket without even looking at it; "and it would be a considerable pull on our capital if we had to provide a bushel of these."

"I hope we shall not be put to the test," said Spiegel, laughing. "But, joking apart, let us soon see the results; and, above all things, do not delay your departure to the place. If the affair turns out as well as we expect, and if you find everything confirmed, let me know, or come back yourself. I will, in that case, sell my land; we can buy that tract, and we shall soon astonish the folks at Adelaide with the first cart-load of coals. My dear friend, I think I shall run mad with joy if it succeeds!"

"You will excuse me now, my dear Doctor," said Von Pick; "I have still——"

"Pray no apology between us," said Dr. Spiegel, pushing him to the door. "Settle what you have to settle, and let me know everything."

"At any rate, I shall see you again before I leave," said the young man, taking up his hat. "Madame, I have the honour to wish you a good day. Good-bye, Doctor!" and, with a bow to the stranger, he left the room, to go to the nearest hotel and change the note.

"Now, sir, I am quite at your service. Pray, mother, where is the *South-Australian Register* and the German paper? Ah, here are the last numbers! Sit down, and look out what you want. If I can give you any other information, I shall be most happy to do so."

M'Donald thanked him, and drew up to a table in the middle of the room which was covered with books and writings. He glanced over the papers, and made a note of what interested him in his pocket-book.

"I suppose you come from inland?" said Spiegel, as M'Donald pushed the papers away and rose from his seat. "In the bush, papers are certainly somewhat scarce. Do you intend to leave Australia?"

"No," said M'Donald. "I am a physician, and, at the same time, something of a natural philosopher; and I have a cargo of stuffed birds, which I wish to send to a friend in Germany. I should like to find a safe, and, if possible, a German ship. I see there are two such advertised to sail in a short time."

"Yes, if you believe the advertisement," said Spiegel; "but that is never to be trusted; for when the day of sailing mentioned in the paper arrives, the departure is frequently postponed. That will not matter. Send your things on board the *Albertine*, of Hamburg, which has just arrived in port. The captain's name is Helger, and he is a very intimate friend of mine. You need only say you are recommended by me, and I know he will take care of your things. If you like, I can give you a few lines to him."

"You are very kind," answered M'Donald. "Yes, I should be very glad; I am, of course, anxious that the box should be kept dry, as the contents are rather valuable."

"By the way," said Spiegel, "there is a man here who will interest you, as you are engaged in these pursuits, and he may, perhaps, be of use to you. His name is Breyfeld; he spends the whole year in the bush for no other purpose than that of shooting birds and stuffing them, and he always brings lots of them to Adelaide. Perhaps we shall be able to see him, as he is at Saaldorf just now. But pray where do you come from at present?"

"From Melbourne."

"Oh, that is a pity; I thought you might, perhaps, have come from the Upper Murray, and hoped to hear something about the late bushranger affair which occurred there, by the Rufus, I think."

"I read the account in the paper," said M'Donald, quietly. "It seems that a couple of the fugitives were overtaken by the native police and given up to justice."

"Yes; but that is not true," replied Spiegel. "The news of the capture was premature; they had, indeed, caught the captain of the band, a certain Jack Loudon. One of the bandits, however, managed to kill a trooper of the native police, by whom he was wounded, and in his attempt to escape was drowned in the Murray; while the other, this very Jack Loudon, who appears to be a thorough brigand, again escaped, and the police are now upon his tracks."

"Indeed!" said M'Donald, listening attentively; "but how do you know that, since this is, if I am not mistaken, the latest number of the paper?"

"You are right; but this morning I had the pleasure of speaking to an old friend of mine, whose acquaintance I made at Sydney—one Lieutenant Walker, of the police force—who passed through this place and told me the news. He was making for Adelaide as quickly as possible, in order to watch the port, and prevent the escape of the fugitive by homeward-bound ships. He asked me at the same time, as there are no police in the place, to have my eye on the neighbourhood. I am an advocate and attorney, as you probably know."

M'Donald felt thankful that he had changed his dress on arriving at the settlement. With his natural shrewdness, he saw that there was no immediate danger to be apprehended. No one on the Murray, not even Lieutenant Walker, knew that he spoke German so perfectly. The dismissed hut-keeper, who must be roaming about somewhere,

was indeed aware of the fact, but it was not probable that he could be recognised and betrayed by him. The only thing he had to do was to avoid meeting the lieutenant, who would very soon have seen through his disguise. But he felt a pang at his heart on hearing that for the time his escape by sea was cut off, unless he could find some means to overcome the difficulty. At any rate, he was upon his guard, and could take his measures accordingly.

"It really is a pity," continued Spiegel, "you do not know more about this affair. I should have been extremely glad to get at the details; I have no doubt they are most interesting. This Jack Loudon must be a fearful fellow, and has, I think, shot more black and white men than I have partridges during my whole life. For instance, the history of the traveller whose boots he stole, makes one's hair stand an end."

"There you are quite right;" observed M'Donald, who was delighted to see Spiegel confounding the two fugitives. "I heard something about him too; he is said to be a wild, red-haired, terrible fellow."

"Red-haired? No," said Spiegel; "according to the hasty description the lieutenant gave me of him, his hair is something like yours, only thicker, and perhaps somewhat darker; a strong beard, dark eyes, a slender figure, but a tremendously bold fellow. The lieutenant would not give me the particulars; he said he had no time, or perhaps he did not like to do so. These gentlemen are always too mysterious. A little more frankness would frequently be of use to them, particularly with those who may almost be said to belong to the profession."

"Well, enough of this unpleasant subject," said M'Donald; "there is plenty of misery, without wilfully conjuring up such scenes of horror."

"Yes; but I have particular reasons for it, my dear Doctor," said Spiegel, rubbing his hands. "I am not only a barrister, but also an author, and am just preparing a novel of Australian life, for which I am in want of a good deal of material. I have plenty of characters, splendid characters, only I want materials; I want plot and situations, to give life and piquancy to the whole. Did you ever try your hand at anything of the sort?"

"Never," replied M'Donald, with a smile. "Although my life has abounded in interesting episodes, I never had time

or ability to commit my adventures to paper. That is a gift which we cannot acquire, if nature has not been bountiful to us."

"You are quite right," said the old dame, mixing in the conversation, "and you have no idea, Doctor, what imagination my son has. Indeed, one sometimes feels inclined to shudder all over when he reads his compositions. And then he describes everything in so lively a manner as to bring it visibly before the eye of the mind."

"Dear mother," said Dr. Spiegel, with a good-tempered smile, and blushing slightly, "you are not an impartial judge; you have a feeling in my favour, which you will not easily abandon."

"I?" exclaimed the old lady; "you do not know me then; have I not always told you, plainly told you, whenever there was anything in your works which did not please me?"

"Well, be that as it may," said her son, with a smile, "I can tell you, dear sir, I have a few splendid characters in my novel, taken from life. They are people you may see every day amongst us; and at the first glance you can perceive whom I mean to sketch off. There is one character particularly I like very much, but which will give me a great deal of trouble in the execution. I think he must play the principal part. He is a German—wretched, used up; considers us as the remnants of a glorious race; walks about with a fez, a red dressing-gown, and a long turkish pipe; despairs of mankind; laments that the right moment is past, and that we are fast approaching a sad future; at the same time hesitating and wanting firmness; a sort of Hamlet, although, of course, of quite a different kind. I shall have to make him become mad at the end, only I don't yet know quite clearly *why?* In fact, I have nothing particular for him to do; but I tell you it is a capital character, and will answer remarkably well."

"I should like to read your book very much," said M'Donald, who was all the time thinking about his own affairs, and had scarcely understood one word out of ten. "I suppose you will have it printed?"

"Of course," exclaimed Dr. Spiegel. "Do you think I should work like that for my own pleasure? All this must bring interest—bear fruit. If you could manage to spend an evening with me, we could get through some passages which are finished."

"I should like to hear something of the sort," replied M'Donald, intending only to make an indifferent promise for an uncertain and far-distant period. But Dr. Spiegel thought differently, and at once took him at his word.

"Then stay here this evening," he said, quickly, "and take pot-luck—plain fare, a cup of tea and a piece of bread-and-butter, and I'll read you a few chapters out of my 'Antipodes,'—that is the name of the novel: a famous title, is it not? You can spend the night with us. There is nothing extraordinary in such a thing in Australia, and only requires a little management."

M'Donald was frightened. In his present position, he neither felt disposed to listen to a novel for several hours nor wished to spend the night with this new acquaintance. However, he was anxious to keep on good terms with Spiegel, at least as long as he remained in the neighbourhood. He therefore excused himself by saying that he could not possibly avail himself of the invitation for that evening, as old Lischke had kindly invited and was now expecting him.

"That is different," said Spiegel; "of course you must go this evening, although I must say Lischke is a fearfully tiresome fellow, who can talk about nothing but his farm or trade. He is one of your *practical* men, machines of flesh and bone, possessed of a certain capability of thought, but of so low a kind that it may at some future period very easily be replaced by steam, just the same as the work of his hands, to which this little amount of thought is applied."

"Well, Lischke seemed to me to be a very worthy man."

"In his way, certainly. The only good he has done that I know of is, giving his daughter a sensible education. Susanna possesses a refinement far above her station, and even has a taste for literature; and this cannot be said of her father, who only takes interest in the news of the market. She sometimes comes to visit us. Now I think of it, I intended asking her next Tuesday evening, with a few more friends. The old man will not accompany her, and his wife never goes out. We can have a little music and reading, and you would do me a great favour by joining the party."

"You are very kind ——"

"And," continued Dr. Spiegel, "I'll give you the invitation for Susan. There—pray deliver this to the young lady. By the way, what is your profession?"

"I am a physician," replied M'Donald.

"A physician?—and you perhaps intend to establish yourself here?"

"If I saw a favourable opening I might do so."

"That would be capital—plenty of prospects; for our little place just now stands in great need of a good physician. Our little assembly will be an excellent thing for you, as you will get acquainted with some most respectable people."

"We shall be very glad to see you here," said the old lady, supporting her son's invitation, which M'Donald accepted with thanks.

"I will accompany you a short distance," said Dr. Spiegel, as the stranger took his hat. "Stop—I recollect now that Captain Helger, of the *Albertine*, was to be at Saaldorf to-day. If that is the case, we shall find him at the hotel, and you can settle everything with him at once. He is a most amiable man."

To avoid exciting suspicion, M'Donald was forced to agree to the proposal, although he did not wish to become acquainted with more people than was absolutely necessary. However, his introduction by Dr. Spiegel as a German physician might perhaps serve to remove every possible suspicion; and if he was only able to act his part as a German, he need be under no apprehension as to his future security. Spiegel took off his sky-blue dressing-gown, threw it over the back of a chair, slipped a coat upon his back which had been hanging at a hook behind the door, put on his hat, and said,—

"Now, my dear friend, I am quite at your service."

"But you have not changed your slippers, my dear," said his mother, smiling.

"Ah, you are right, mother!" replied her son, with a laugh; "when one's head is continually so full ——"

"I should be very sorry to take you from your work."

"Pray, don't mention it;—not in the least," said Dr. Spiegel, pulling on the somewhat tight boots—"a short relaxation (I wish the shoemaker were at the devil!) is very good for me. One must not tax the mind too much either; and at the Saaldorf Hotel they have really splendid beer. There!" giving a final stamp with the boots he had at last got on, "now we can go. Good bye, mother. Tell Bertha I shall be back in an hour at the latest."

As the two gentlemen were leaving the house, they encountered at the door a peculiarly strange figure.

It was a black, in the state they very frequently roam about the settlements and towns, sometimes singly, sometimes in small troops or families. A law made for their special behoof forbids them to appear in towns in their national costume, *i. e.*, quite naked. Both men and women must at least wear a shirt, and there is a certain length prescribed for this garment. Strangely enough, the men take to this costume much quicker than the women, who almost invariably wrap themselves up in their grey opossum cloaks.

It can easily be imagined that strange costumes are sometimes seen, especially with the men. They generally confine themselves to the obligatory garment, and run about in their shirts, not unlike people flying out of their beds from a conflagration, unable to save anything but the most necessary article of dress. It sometimes happens that the whim or taste of the wearer, or a humorous white man, make some other additions to this costume—as, for instance, an old worn-out dress-coat, or a waistcoat, or a cravat, and such like. They experience the greatest difficulty in accustoming themselves to boots and trousers, although I once saw a black who had glued the red stripes of a pair of uniform trousers upon his bare legs. Paper stick-ups and cuffs are also to be met with.

The individual alluded to just before, wore, besides the not over-long, blue-striped sailor's shirt, a black silk hat, that had been somewhat roughly treated, it is true, and a pair of braces; and to keep them in their places, he had tied round the middle of his body a common boat-rope. When the two gentlemen emerged from the house he stood still and upright, staring them in the face.

"Ah!" said Spiegel, with a smile, on seeing him. "Behold again one of the characters in my novel! Well, how do you like this specimen? However," he added, with mock politeness, pointing at the black, who was still standing immovable before them, "I have the pleasure of introducing to you Dr. Behr."

On being thus introduced, the man closely imitating the manners of the people whose braces, shirt, name, and hat, he wore, at once took off the latter with a low bow, and waved it towards the stranger, who could not help smiling. The

black, on the contrary, fully preserved his gravity, and covered himself again, when he saw his courtesy returned, though not to the full extent.

"His name was Tunjumlong," Spiegel said; "but a German physician, and a very talented man, who, I am sorry to say, left Australia, and whose name was Behr, exchanged names with him, according to the friendly habits of the natives; and in consequence of this Tunjumlong has been promoted, and is now generally known by his new name. Well, my dear colleague," he said in English to the black, who had all this time been attentively looking at him, "how are you? When did you return to Saaldorf, and where have you been all the time?"

"In the bush, mister," said Dr. Behr, with a pretty clear and correct pronunciation. "But bad in the bush,—no more possums, no more kangaroo, no emus: Dr. Behr is hungry."

"The old story," said Spiegel, laughing, giving the black at the same time a small silver coin. "There, buy some bread with it, but no brandy: do you hear?"

The black glanced at the coin, to ascertain whether it really was *white* money, which they knew very well how to distinguish from the *red*, and then made a second bow, as low as the first. After receiving the money, he did not think it worth while to discuss the use he meant to make of it; so he put the coin, for the want of a pocket, into his mouth, and slowly and gravely strode down the street.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SAALDORF HOTEL.

THE "Saaldorf Hotel," was situated in the principal street of the little town. It was a large brick building, with an outside that gave promises scarcely fulfilled by the interior. There was, however, a pretty comfortable coffee-room, furnished after the English fashion; and the bar contained everything that could rejoice a thirsty soul, or allure one who was not thirsty. Jacob Meier, the host, kept excellent light

beer, more suited to the taste of Germans than the heavy ale and porter.

In England, with its humid and foggy climate, such liquors, and sherry, port, and brandy answer very well; and the consumption shows that they suit the constitutions of the inhabitants. But the atmosphere of Australia, which is extremely dry, requires no such stimulants; and even light spirituous liquors, taken in quantities, are more apt to do harm than in the old country.

The customers of the hotel usually assembled towards dark, and according to the good, or rather not good, old German custom, remained together until ten or eleven o'clock. Many glasses of beer, of hot punch, and brandy, the busy bar-keeper had to serve up amidst the warmest arguments, and very useless, but no less hard-fought discussions on European policy.

The coffee-house was on this day tolerably empty; there were only three men sitting at one table by the window, with a bottle of Rhine wine and green glasses, and one at another close by, with a glass of beer before him. They were all apparently engaged in conversation.

"Hallo, Doctor, that is right! I am glad you are come," said Schelling, the chemist, on seeing Dr. Spiegel come in, whilst another of the party arose, somewhat confused, and advanced towards him—this was the Baron Von Pick. The third, the captain of the *Albertine*, from Hamburg, with a comfortable sun-burnt face, and small penetrating eyes, sat still, gave him a friendly nod, and said with a laugh, as he pushed a seat with his foot,—

"Come aboard, Doctor; we were just going to make signals for you. We have been lying off here an hour at least, with all sails aback, and driving-to with might and main."

"My dear Doctor," said Von Pick, in a whisper, taking his friend's hand, "I am waiting for Johnson, the Englishman: he promised to be here at five o'clock. I am glad I have the opportunity of seeing you again."

The doctor merely squeezed his hand, at the same time, however, glancing at the Rhine wine-bottles. He soon directed his attention to the captain, who was the chief cause of his coming here, to introduce the German to him.

"Ah! my dear Captain," he said, walking up to him and

shaking him by the hand, "I am heartily glad to see you again on firm land."

"Well, how are you, Doctor?" replied the latter, laughing. "Have you any notion of taking a little trip?"

"Much obliged to you, Captain," replied the doctor; "but, with all reverence for your ship be it said, I wish the salt water at the devil!"

"Well, if you think so," replied the captain, "I am astonished you stay here at Saaldorf. Do you drink anything else? Your coffee tastes salt, and so does your tea, and even your beer; and as for getting a glass of water, that is quite out of the question, unless it *must* be taken as medicine."

"Not quite so bad as that either," said the chemist; "it tastes somewhat brackish, that is all."

"Yes. Just let a glassful evaporate, and even the next day you will find the bottom covered with salt about the thickness of your thumb," said the captain.

"Captain," observed Dr. Spiegel, "I have the pleasure of introducing to you Dr. Schreiber. I quite forget where you are from," he added, turning to M'Donald.

"Never mind the colours," replied the captain, "when we have the handle to a man—his name. Pray be seated, gentlemen, or else I shall have to get up too. Come now, fire away!"

"Mr. Schelling, chemist, of Saaldorf—Mr. Von Pick you know. Ah! here is our learned ornithologist, Mr. Breyfeld, of whom I have already spoken."

"Well, when you have got quite clear," said the captain, impatiently, "I hope you will come to anchor, and—— Waiter, a couple of glasses for these gentlemen—our neighbour there will not drink wine."

"Now, Captain, I am quite at your service."

"What tiresome people you are on shore," said the captain, laughing.

"It was done in a minute, Captain; and now to business. This gentleman wishes to send a box of bird-skins to Germany—something in your way, Mr. Breyfeld—and I have recommended you and your ship. I have no doubt you would be so kind——"

"We'll take care of it," answered the captain, with a nod; "only send it aboard with the address upon it."

"But the things must be kept dry; they are——"

"Whatever it be, we shall not leave it on deck. More of that anon. Waiter, let us have another bottle of the same."

"When do you intend sailing, Captain?" asked M'Donald, as the sailor was filling the glasses.

"Very uncertain—hope to get clear in about eight days, if freight comes on board soon. But there is copper ore coming from the mines of Burra-Burra, and the roads are very bad. At any rate, I shall not wait longer than a fortnight; whatever is not on board then may stay behind."

"Well, here is to a prosperous voyage, Captain!" said Dr. Spiegel, raising his glass. "Calm weather, and no storms!"

"Hang your wish!" said the seaman, putting his glass down again. "I suppose you'll wish me four months' calm! As far as I am concerned, it may blow as hard as it likes, so it comes from the direction we want it; and if we had to run the whole of the time under reefed sails I should not complain. Now to that I'll drink."

The glasses were just jingling against each other when the door opened, and a very young man, who appeared to be scarcely twenty years of age, spurred, with a riding-whip in his hand, the student's club-cap fastened under his chin by a strap, entered the room, and ordered a glass of beer as soon as he stepped over the threshold.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, throwing his cap and whip on a table and sitting down as if he was exhausted. The rest answered the greeting, with the exception of the chemist, who slowly sipped off his glass, muttering something like an oath over the sparkling, bubbling wine.

"Good evening, Dr. Fiedel!" said Spiegel, looking over his shoulder."

"Another doctor!" muttered the captain, half aloud, to the chemist. "There is a regular swarm of them."

"Oh, he has run away from his nurse," growled the chemist. "A pinafore and sucking-bottle would become him better than spurs and a whip. He can drink beer, that's all."

"Waiter, another glass," said the young man, and, as if to confirm the latter words, emptying the one placed before him at a draught. "You should have been with me to-day, Dr. Spiegel; you would have got materials for your novel. Plenty of adventures!"

"Did you meet with the bushranger?" asked Dr. Spiegel, turning round quickly with great eagerness.

"The bushranger?" cried the captain, laughing. "Have you got a bushranger here?"

"Worse than that," exclaimed the young doctor, almost emptying the second glass and setting it on the table. "I would rather meet ten bushrangers and bandits than go through another day like this."

"What has happened?" they all eagerly asked, with the exception of the chemist, who contented himself by growling something about "stuff and nonsense."

"Listen!" said Dr. Fiedel, jumping up in the heat of his story, and placing himself behind Dr. Spiegel's chair, who turned round full of expectation. "You know I have a great deal to do, and am scarcely able to visit all my patients in one day, and sometimes not in two. Well then, as I was going at full speed along the plain behind Saaldorf, to get to my house and change horses, I missed the way which leads to the bridge, and suddenly found myself on the tranquil shore of the river."

"The river?" said Dr. Spiegel, with astonishment, "what river? Why, there is no river besides the Torrens near Adelaide, and in summer you can cross it without wetting your feet."

"No river here! What do you call the treacherous stream which flows into Saaldorf just below?"

"The brook, you mean!" said Von Pick, laughing.

"Brook!" exclaimed the youthful doctor, contemptuously. "Just go out and see how it is swollen in consequence of the late rains. My horse reared and would not ford it; but I spurred his flanks, gave him a cut with the whip,—the steep brink of the bank crumbled under his feet—and, half falling, half leaping, we plunged into the yellow waves, which closed over us."

"Now, hang the fellow!" said the chemist, unable to contain his wrath any longer; "the gutter is not four inches deep."

The young doctor did not reply. He knew that the chemist hated him because he once said he did not know how to make up his prescriptions, and he was consequently in the habit of sending all his patients to Adelaide. However, he despised the chemist.

"Closed over us," he repeated with a contemptuous glance

in that direction. "In an instant I pulled my horse up again, and, lifting it with spur and bridle, climbed up the almost perpendicular wall of clay."

"A cat would leap over it!" said the chemist, as if speaking to himself.

"I thought the worst was over," Fiedel continued, nothing daunted, "for the hoofs of my brave animal just touched the top, and he almost got firm footing. Suddenly a black started up before me, close to my horse's neck. It saw his glittering eyes darting fire at me. In his right hand he carried a short war-club, with which he aimed a blow at my head."

"A black?" said the chemist doubtfully, shaking his head.

"It is scarcely possible," said Spiegel, "that a black should dare to attack a white man so close to the settlement. Perhaps he was standing near and wanted to assist you."

"Assist?" remarked Fiedel, with a laugh. "I would rather be without such assistance. With his left hand he pushed my horse down the bank, and endeavoured with his right to deal the deadly blow. I should have been lost if my presence of mind had not saved me.—Waiter, another pot of beer, and look sharp!—Unarmed as I was, I gained time to turn my whip in my hand, and giving my horse the spur, I hit the black, who was clinging to the bridle, a well-aimed blow on the temple. He staggered back; I spurred my horse, which got a firm footing, and the next instant I had escaped all danger."

"Wonderful, indeed!" exclaimed Von Pick. "I often ride about the country in all directions, and at all times of the night, and was never either attacked by blacks, nor did I come to the steep banks of the river."

"Well, if that is your boasted security," said the captain, "I'll have none of it, and the sooner I return on board the better."

"You should give information of this," said Breyfeld, who had not before spoken a syllable, intent upon his examination of the stranger. The news that he was going to send bird-skins to Germany interested him particularly. "If the blacks are allowed to do what they please, they will soon become troublesome: as it is, one can scarcely get on with them in the bush."

"Pooh! what is the use of the police?" exclaimed the young doctor, with a contemptuous toss of the head. "There is nothing like defending yourself; and the black rascals who attack *me* must blame themselves for the consequences. I shall carry a brace of loaded pistols. By-the-bye, Doctor, is there a man here who can make good holsters?"

"Why, the saddler, I suppose; but I cannot think——"

"Think? what is the use of thinking, when I have the *proofs?*" exclaimed the doctor with the spurs, at the same time pouring down his throat, rather than drinking, the beer just brought to him. "Bless me, it is already late, and I have yet five or six visits to make, from Lischke's, at one end of the town, to Dornweber's at the other."

"But there is no one ill at Lischke's that I am aware of," observed Von Pick.

"Oh, our doctor visits people who are well too," Spiegel remarked, laughing. "Susanna Lischke attracts a good deal of his attention."

"Not a bit," replied the spruce young man, with indifference. "I don't think of the young lady. Moreover, her old bear of a father is always at her heels. At the same time, I will not deny that I am thinking seriously of marrying. You know yourself a physician *must* marry if he wishes his patients, particularly the female portion, to have confidence in him. But, the devil," he exclaimed, as at this moment the head of a black dived up before the window, against which he flattened his nose. He disappeared almost in the same moment, like an apparition.

"What is that?" asked the captain. "By heavens, I think the black rascals intend attacking us here in the room. For God's sake empty your glasses, that the wine may not be spilled in the mêlée."

He had scarcely brought his own glass to his lips, when the door opened, and as he looked round he saw a black in a blue shirt with a silk hat on his head: in a word, our old acquaintance, Dr. Behr, late Tunjumlong.

"Dr. Behr!" Spiegel exclaimed, with astonishment, and bursting with laughter.

"Another doctor!" exclaimed the captain, "and a black one into the bargain! Doctors must grow here like mushrooms!"

Dr. Behr, without noticing the rest, went straight to Dr.

Fiedel, and holding out his open hand towards him, said, with a grin of recognition,—

"Come, white man—little piece of white money for to-day."

"White money! what for?" said the young Æsculapius, somewhat surprised, but also somewhat red in the face.

"What for?" said Tunjumlong, without withdrawing his hand—"not bad; has not Dr. Behr fetched horse out of little brook when white man fell off and did not know what to do?"

"Ah! this was the fearful attack!" exclaimed the apothecary triumphantly from behind the table. "This was the terrible black, and he is now carrying his war-club on his head."

"A lie! nothing but a d—d lie!" roared the promising young leech, casting a furious glance at the chemist, and leaving the room in haste without saying another word.

"That's capital!" exclaimed the captain, with a quiet laugh; "now we have the bandit story cleared up by Dr. Behr, while the other doctor runs before the wind at the rate of fourteen knots an hour."

"I am heartily glad we have settled him," said the chemist, who felt satisfied now the other had left the room. "Such a milksop as that to call himself 'Doctor.' He was, very likely, expelled before he ever passed an examination, and then came to Australia to humbug us! Here, Dr. Behr, that's a good fellow, here is something for you;" and he gave the smirking black a shilling.

"I shan't brace back either," said the captain, giving him a trifle; "here, honoured Doctor! The deuce, he has lost his trousers from under the braces, and is not any the wiser. A pretty figure you are! The mizzen requires a patch."

Spiegel and M'Donald gave him something, and the black left the room highly delighted, and showing a couple of rows of splendid teeth as he bowed to the ground and waved his hat.

M'Donald felt extremely ill at ease. Some one might come in and recognise him, although he had endeavoured to alter his appearance. The evening was setting in and it was time for him to move; so he rose and took his hat in order to return to Lischke's.

"I say, Mr. Von Pick," cried the captain, filling the glasses again, "do you happen to know in the neighbourhood,

or at Adelaide, a gentleman of the name of Hohburg? Hang it! he is said to have settled here in South Australia, and I cannot manage to learn where. I knew him in Germany, and should be glad at least to hear he how is getting on."

"Hohburg?—No," replied Von Pick. "I certainly know the name, but cannot recollect the person that bears it."

"There is a Mrs. Hohburg living in the neighbourhood," said M'Donald, who had listened with great attention on hearing the name mentioned; "but she is a sempstress, and, as far as I know, a widow."

"Yes, that is the so-called poor widow," said Schelling. "I know her too. She came here, with her husband, from Mount Barker, I think. He was a day-labourer, shepherd, and God knows what else! and disappeared afterwards—a very worthless sort of a fellow."

"No, I do not mean them," replied the captain; "the one I mean must have considerable property somewhere in the neighbourhood. He is very wealthy, and a fine young fellow—at least, he was formerly, although he has grown a little older now."

"I do not know him," said Von Pick. "Perhaps he is in some other settlement; there are Germans to be found everywhere."

"Do you know any one who could give me any information on the subject?"

"Hem!" said Dr. Spiegel. "There is the old calculator from Dresden, who keeps a register of all the new-comers, and carefully writes down what becomes of them afterwards. If any man in the district knows anything about it, he is the man. You will easily find his house at Adelaide."

"And what is his name?"

"Well, what can be his name, Mr. Von Pick? Do you recollect—you know him?"

"Certainly; but I cannot bring his name to my mind either."

"The spare little man with the large white collars?" asked Schelling.

"The same. Bless me, I have his name on the tip of my tongue!—it commences with a C. It is a sea-fish, I think."

"Cod?" said Helger.

"No, no. Well, how stupid to forget like this!"

"Crab?"

"No, no!—now I have it. His name is Cooke."

"That's a sea-fish!" said Helger, amidst the laughter of the rest. "Well, I shall know him when I next meet him."

"Well, ask him," said Spiegel; "and if the gentleman was or is in Australia, you are sure to find his name on his books."

"Doctor," said Breyfeld to M'Donald, "if you will allow me, I will accompany you a short distance, as I hear you take an interest in Australian ornithology; and I shall perhaps be of some use to you in this matter. I am specially occupied with it, and have a very good collection of specimens, if they can be of any service to you."

M'Donald felt that the untruth he had been forced to tell entailed upon him, if not unpleasant, at least, for the time being, troublesome acquaintances. However, he could not mend matters; and it might even remove suspicion if he seemed to devote himself seriously to this pursuit. No one would suspect a fugitive bushranger of occupying himself with stuffed birds.

Breyfeld was one of those original men who feel much more at ease in distant parts of the world than at home. Manners and customs do not bind them to the props with which the State thinks fit to provide every individual. Their branches are not lopped, and may assume the most eccentric shapes; and as, in this new land, no one cares about his neighbour, and every one can go his own way without impediment; they bloom and grow to any extent, and in all possible shapes.

Breyfeld was one of these. He had formerly filled some Government appointment, and had always shown a particular liking for birds; he would even take them into his close office, to the great vexation of his superiors, and, as he was at last forbidden to do so, he felt the oppression of the old country. Every one is most sensitive on some particular point. A small inheritance, which he soon after received very unexpectedly, came just, as he thought, at a favourable moment to show the petty tyrants of his district that the inferior *employés* will not suffer themselves to be trampled upon at their

pleasure. He sent in his resignation and emigrated to Australia, carrying with him innumerable bird-cages filled with the songsters of his home.

On the voyage, they called him "Papageno." However, it was by no means a bad speculation; for, on his arrival in Australia, he sold the European singing-birds at such extremely high prices, that it entirely covered the expenses of his passage, and he commenced life at the antipodes in the same position as when he left home. After he had lost his small capital in experiments, he went to live in a hut in the bush, caught birds and tamed them, shot others, which he skinned and stuffed, and sold collections of them to ship-captains, who paid very little for them, or to tradesmen at Adelaide, who would have liked to get them for nothing. It was by no means a brilliant business. He lived as sparingly as civilized man can live, and seemed to find some compensation for everything else in satisfying this only passion.

His dress, too, was somewhat strange, or exhibited at least a peculiar taste. While a clerk in the Government office, he longed for a grass-green coat with bright metal buttons, but his superiors could never be persuaded that such a costume was compatible with his profession—that of drawing up legal documents. As soon, therefore, as he found himself independent, and was no longer under the necessity of troubling himself about his superiors or the respectability of his appearance; he had procured himself such a coat, with which he arrived in Australia. Whatever his countrymen might say or think of this striking garment, it pleased the blacks uncommonly, especially the buttons. Some who assisted the wearer in collecting, catching, or killing birds, could only be prevailed upon, by the promise of one such button, to procure him an emu, or some other bird difficult to obtain. Breyfeld was, therefore, under the unpleasant necessity of gradually sacrificing the brilliant buttons, and, not being able to procure similar ones, he replaced them by buttons of horn. In this manner he had only, at the time we speak of, three of the original buttons left.

He wore gaiters, and very tight-fitting saffron-coloured trousers, thick bush boots, and a green so-called gardener's cap, which had points to the four quarters of the compass. His head was quite bald, and the chemist never missed the

opportunity of coming out with the stereotyped joke, that he had shaven off his hair to grow feathers.

From his long sojourn in Australia, Breyfeld knew the bush perfectly, and was in other respects a simple-minded, good-hearted man, liked by all that knew him.

"By the way, Schelling," said Spiegel, seeing M'Donald ready to start—"allow me, Doctor—I have the pleasure to inform you that my friend, Doctor Schreiber, is by no means indisposed to establish himself here as a physician, and only wishes to reconnoitre the ground a little."

"I am delighted to hear it!" exclaimed Schelling, his eyes sparkling with pleasure, as he shook M'Donald by the hand. "We should get rid of this young puppy of a self-constituted doctor in no time. You would soon see what a practice you would get, especially after this Dr. Fiedel. Generally speaking, the climate is too healthy, both for physicians and druggists. I should not wonder if the people at last thought that they did not want us at all. But if this doctor goes on for a short time, we shall have patients enough, and you will make a splendid harvest. He says he must marry, to obtain confidence! Who ever heard of such a thing! What he wants is, a nurse to teach him manners, the greenhorn! The monkey has the impudence to say his prescriptions, which he always abbreviates because he does not know the endings, cannot be made up properly at my establishment—says he will order a chemical apparatus, to analyze the medicines, the jackanapes! No, Doctor; stay here, and I promise to get you a famous practice, if people will only fall ill. In whatever way I can serve you, you may depend upon my so doing."

Schelling had become quite heated, and emptied the glass standing before him at one draught.

"I thank you," replied M'Donald, "for your good-will towards me. Under these circumstances, I will endeavour to make a position here, and to gain the confidence of the public. For the present, gentlemen, I wish you a very good evening."

"Good-bye, Doctor!" said Spiegel, shaking hands with him. "Well, then, I hope I shall see you again on Tuesday evening, and that you will not forget your promise."

"Certainly not," replied M'Donald. Accompanied by Breyfeld, he left the house to return to Lischke's, his present domicile.

"Is that a German?" said Captain Helger, when M'Donald had left the room. "His pronunciation sounds strange, and his whole rig seems rather that of an Englishman."

"He has lived some time in England," said Spiegel, "he told me so himself as we came here, and may have contracted something of English manners."

"Well, he seems to be a decent fellow," said Schelling, "and I am firmly persuaded he will have no difficulty in throwing the young beer-swiller out of the saddle."

"That would be no masterpiece, if we are to believe Dr. Behr's testimony," said the captain, laughing. "Indeed, the fellow looked superb, and I should like to take him to Hamburg just as he is."

"Our Englishman is a long time coming," said Spiegel, aside, to Von Pick. "You are sure he is coming?"

"He will keep his word, you may depend upon that," replied Von Pick. "You should see how eager and enthusiastic he is for the undertaking!"

"So much the better," said Spiegel, smiling; "but I must go now," he added, aloud. "Gentlemen, before I take my leave, I wish you would do me the favour to promise to come to a homely tea-party at my house on Tuesday evening, if you have nothing better to do. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you? And you too, captain: I shall reckon upon you. Very well, I shall be glad to see you. Good evening!"

"A homely tea-party," said the captain, as the door closed upon Dr. Spiegel. "When you are invited to a 'homely tea-party,' your host is sure to perform *more* than he promises."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE POOR WIDOW.

THE dusk of the evening was already closing in, when Mrs. Hohburg, or "the poor widow," as the neighbours called her, set out on her way to her small, poor dwelling. She led her little girl by the hand, and walked silently along the broad, dusty road, bordered for some distance by fences and the bush. On the other side of this bush stood her hut, on the

confines of a large, well-fenced field, belonging to a wealthy Englishman.

"Why are you so sad this evening?" said the little girl, as they approached the house, and the increasing darkness of the bush awed the child—so much the more that the mother did not speak a word.

"Am I sad, dear Lizzy?" replied Mrs. Hohburg, patting the child's head.

"You do not speak—are you angry with me?" the little one asked, timidly.

Her mother bent down and kissed the child.

"No, my darling, I am not, you are so very good: why should I be angry with you?"

"Then you are thinking of father, mamma!"

The woman did not answer, but took her child's hand and quickened her pace until she came to her small dwelling, when she unlocked the door, and stepped into the bare and naked room.

She lighted a tallow candle stuck in a common tin candlestick, and took out of her pocket a flask of milk she had brought from Lischke's, to prepare supper for herself and the child. This was soon done. The milk was poured out into two tin pots, taken from a chest in the corner. It was used as store-room, as well as clothes-press. She also took a loaf and cut some bread for herself and the child, and they commenced their frugal repast.

It was indeed a poor dwelling, which the careful woman had made as habitable as possible.

In one corner stood a bedstead made of rough planks, with a hard mattress, stuffed with sea-grass, and a woollen blanket; the sheets were patched in several places, but as white as snow. In painful contrast to this poor couch was a richly-embroidered velvet cushion, which served as a pillow for the child, and, with the fine damask napkin spread out on the homely table for the tin pot of milk and the piece of black bread, reminded them of better, happier times. At the narrow window, too, there was that which did not suit this place, an embroidered curtain. It had been washed so often, that it barely held together. Altogether, the greatest cleanliness prevailed in the small room. The floor, although bare, and not even covered with planks, was carefully swept, and strewed with

river-sand. The utensils were as bright as a looking-glass, and a few flowers, growing in the bush, had been gathered by the poor woman to adorn the lonely dwelling. The plaster which had covered the wood of which the hut was built, had fallen off in many places, and the air blew keenly through these openings. The roof, too, wanted repair: if it rained hard, the water penetrated through many a crevice, forming small pools on the floor.

For the hunter in the forest, this small hut, only half protected against wind and rain, would certainly have been deemed sufficient: for the woman and child it was a sad, comfortless dwelling.

When the simple meal was over, Mrs. Hohburg removed the things, washed the tin cups in the river and wiped them, moved the only chair which was in the room to the table, placed the light close on the border of it, to recommence her sewing.

"Are you tired, Lizzy; and do you wish to go to bed?" she asked the child, who leaned against the table, watching her.

"No, dear mamma," replied the little one; "I will sit with you, and you must tell me something of Germany and grandmamma, and of the fine large schools which are there, and of the many little children that go to them, and learn so many pretty things."

The woman sighed; her work dropped into her lap; she beckoned her child to come near, and gently pressing it to her bosom, imprinted kisses on its gentle brow.

"But you must not cry, mamma!" said the little one, as she felt a hot and heavy tear drop upon her forehead. "Father will soon come back, and love you very much, and will not beat you again; you work so very much, without ceasing almost, night or day."

"Hush, child, hush!" said her mother, pressing her still closer to her; "it breaks my heart to hear you talk so. Come, I will tell you something: fetch your little stool, and sit down beside me."

"When will father come back, mamma?"

"I do not know, dear Lizzy. Very soon, if he is still alive."

"Of course he is alive," said the little one, looking up to her mother with an expression of surprise. "You made me

pray for him every night and morning, and told me yourself that God hears the prayers of children."

"Yes, he *will* come back, Lizzy," said the mother, unable to contain her tears any longer, "and will love us both very, very much. He only went away to get money for us to take us back to grandmamma."

"And grandmamma loves us, doesn't she, mamma?"

"Yes, yes, my child," whispered the woman, "she does; and little Lizzy will go to a fine large school, with other little girls, and sleep in a soft, warm, little bed, and have warm and pretty clothes, and learn a great, great deal."

"Oh, I am so glad, mamma! I wish father would bring the money. Then you will get good warm clothes too, mamma, won't you? and you will not work so much, and we shall not live alone in the bush, as we do here."

"Go, my dear child," said the mother, who wished to be alone to collect herself, "get me a drink of water; but take care you don't fall."

"I shall not fall, the moon is so very bright," said Lizzy, obeying, and running to the door with a tin cup; "and I know the place where to get the water very well."

The child hastened to fetch the drink for her mother, and the latter, with her heavy head resting on her hand, her elbow propped on the table, seemed lost in sad thoughts, while the work lay untouched in her lap.

But Lizzy staid longer than usual, and Mrs. Hohburg fancied that she heard several persons talking outside. She started up in fear and listened at the window—a man's voice was speaking and the child answering. She hastened to the door where Lizzy met her.

"With whom have you been talking, Lizzy—who was there?"

"A poor man, mamma, who is hungry and asked me for a piece of bread."

"A poor man?" Mrs. Hohburg said, with astonishment, for there are no beggars to be met with in the colony. "Did you not tell him to go to the inn?"

"Yes, mamma; but he said he had no money: and he also asked me whether father was at home, and whether he could sleep here to-night."

The woman shook her head, but took the loaf out of the chest and cut a piece off.

"Stay, Lizzy, till I return," she said, going to the door; "put the tin pot on the table—I shall be back immediately."

She opened the door and stepped out. At a few paces from the mat, on a fallen gum-tree, sat the man, with an old straw hat on his head, his arms crossed over his knees, and his head resting upon them.

"Here, friend, here is some bread for you," said the woman, in English; "are you unwell?"

"Yes, I think I am," replied the man, who rose as he heard the voice, and took the bread gratefully; "all my limbs feel as heavy as lead, and I can scarcely move. Could you not give me a place to sleep in?"

The woman looked at the pale, hirsute face turned up to her, and, without answering his question, she asked in a low, tremulous voice,—

"What is your name?"

"Miller," replied the man; "I came a great distance out of the bush."

The woman sighed and said,—

"I am sorry, my good man, I cannot take you in. I live alone here with my child, and have barely bedding enough for myself. But the inn is only a little distance off. If you walk fast, you can easily reach it in half an hour; you will find other houses on the road."

"I thank you," said the man, rising slowly from the log; and taking off his hat, he brushed the entangled hair from his brow; "but I am not able to go so far to-night, and shall lie down under a tree. I have slept in that way many a long and weary night in the bush."

He put on his hat again and turned away.

"You are not an Englishman," said the woman; and her voice sounded hoarse and hollow; she could hardly get these words out.

"No," replied the man; "I am from another country."

"You are a German: your name," she continued, hurriedly, "is not Miller."

The man turned round with surprise, when she went up to him, and, taking him by the wrist, led him towards the hut.

"Not Miller?" repeated he, with an expression almost of fear,—"and you?" But the woman did not reply. With

trembling hand she drew him away from under the dark trees to the light which was burning on the table. There she turned round, and looked at him for a few seconds with fixed gaze. Suddenly she let his arm go, buried her face in her hands, and sank upon her knees against the chair, sobbing aloud.

"Louisa!" exclaimed the stranger, holding himself by the table,—"my wife! my child!"

The woman did not answer: she bent over the chair, and her whole frame quivered convulsively. She kept sobbing, unable to utter a word.

"Mamma, is that father, who was to bring us money to take us to grandmamma?" asked the little one, who had timidly retreated in the corner against the bed.

No one answered. Annihilated, stupified, Miller, or Hohburg, as we must now call him, stood there staring with fixed, lack-lustre eyes at the image of woe and heartrending misery which was kneeling before him upon the ground,—his wife. He had no tears; but his face was pale as that of a corpse; his eyes were fixed in their sockets, his lips quivered, his whole form trembled with shame, remorse, and despair; and he had not even the courage to stretch out his arms to his child.

This lasted for several minutes, being broken only by the low, convulsive sobs of the woman and the heavy breathing of the man. At last the strength of the latter failed him. The consequences of exhaustion, hunger, and agitation revealed themselves: his limbs refused their office; his head grew dizzy, and, staggering to the wall, he supported himself by the window-sill, sank upon the ground, and buried his face in his knees.

At last the woman collected herself: she arose, fixed her glance for a minute on her husband, but spoke not a word; nor did the expression of her features indicate the emotions of her heart: there was on this pale brow, in these tearful eyes, no hatred, no pain, no pity, no love. Then, as if a firm resolve had strengthened her nerves, she walked up to the child, still timidly standing in the corner, took her in her arms, kissed her, and said, in a low but loving voice,—

"Come, my child; it is late, and you had better go to bed."

"Is that the father, mamma," timidly whispered the little one in her ear, "for whose return I prayed every evening?"

"Yes, my child," said the woman.

"Is he ill, mamma? He said he was hungry and had no money to buy bread."

The mother turned her head and heaved a deep sigh, to relieve her anxious and oppressed heart. She tried to answer, but she could not; she felt suffocated, and could not utter a syllable.

"May I not go to him and give him a kiss, mamma?" said the child, laying her little head against her mother's cheek. "He is so sad and ill,—poor papa."

"Go to him, dear Lizzy, go to him," said the mother, placing the little one on the ground; she herself stood still and motionless, following her child with her eyes.

Slowly and timidly the child went to her father, who still remained in the same posture. Twice she stood and looked at her mother; then she went slowly and noiselessly to him, laid her tiny little hand on his shoulder, and whispered in a shy and imploring voice,—"Papa!"

The man started as if the low word had been a stab; his hat had fallen off his head, and with both hands he pushed his wet and entangled hair off his forehead.

"My child!" he said,—"my dear, dear child!"

"Mamma said I must go to bed," whispered the little one: "good night, papa; I am going to pray for you to be well and happy again, and that you may not cry any more: mamma will also give you something to eat; you must not be hungry, or Lizzy would cry the whole night."

"My child!" answered the man, his voice choked with emotion; and he took the child's hand, and was going to draw her towards him, but durst not, and he covered her hands with kisses. The child then threw her arms round his neck, kissed his lips, said once more, "good night!" and remained still and motionless in his arms, when he pressed her to him, and held her in a warm embrace.

"You hurt me father," said the child.

"Good night, my Lizzy; good night, my own dear child: go and sleep, and may God bless and protect your dear head!"

"Good night, papa; mamma will make a bed for you."

His trembling hands unclasped the little one, who ran to her mother to be taken to bed as usual. The woman bent over the couch, prayed with the child, and closed the weary lids with a kiss, watching by her side until she slept. Then she arose noiselessly, snuffed the candle, which stood on the

table, and the long flaming wick of which was hanging down on one side, and again spread the table. She put out the white napkin, the knife and fork; then she fetched the bread and filled the tin pot with milk, and took out of the chest a pewter plate with cold meat, her meal for the coming Sunday.

When the table was laid, she looked at her husband, who had risen slowly, and whose eyes had followed every motion.

"Come and eat, Edward," she said, in a low, hoarse voice, pointing to the table at the same time. She sat down on the side of the bed in which the little one was sleeping, and bent down over the slumbering child. It was only when her eye was no longer fixed on him that he found courage to stir. He went slowly to the table, and devoured, like one famished, the provisions put before him, to the very last crumb of bread. Not a word was spoken; not a sound broke the stillness, except the clattering of the knife and fork, and the tranquil breathing of the sleeping child.

At last Hohburg finished his meal: he pushed the plate away, and rested his head on his hand. The woman, on hearing the noise, rose and cleared the table. Still not a word was exchanged between them.

At last Louisa went to the table, on which she propped herself with both her arms, for she felt her knees trembling, and said, in a low voice, scarcely above a whisper,—

"Is it thus, then, you have returned? Is it thus God has heard my prayer, that you have come to my own hut a beggar? Edward, this is fearful; and if my heart is not broken, it can only be in consequence of the long years of suffering which have hardened it."

The man did not answer a syllable. He looked down for a while, and then his arm fell on the table, and he leaned his head on it in shame and remorse.

"What is to become of us, Edward? Your body is weary and exhausted; your spirit is broken, or you could never have returned thus to the settlement. What is to become of you? I can support myself and the child by my work—with difficulty, it is true, but honestly: how will you support *yourself?*"

Hohburg did not reply; he seemed to have ceased breathing; his neck, upon which the flickering candle cast its full light, was as pale as death; and when his wife, terror-stricken, seized his hand, he slipped slowly off the chair on which he

was sitting, and would have fallen to the ground, if she had not supported him in her arms.

Slowly and carefully she placed him on the ground; then she lifted her sleeping child from the bed, took off the mattress, and laid Lizzy, still slumbering, on the bare straw. She carried the mattress to the wall by the side of her husband, and endeavoured to raise him upon it, but her strength failed her. She could only push the soft couch under his head, and cool his brow and temples with fresh water until he recovered.

Hohburg opened his eyes; but, on recognising the form of his wife bent over him, he shut them again, and groaned, in a low voice,—

"Poor—poor Louisa!"

His wife did not reply. She assisted him on to the couch prepared for him, placed her own pillow under his head, and covered him with her woollen blanket. As she was thus occupied, he took hold of her hand and carried it to his lips. A deep sigh heaved from her breast. Then she turned away, extinguished the candle, and sought her own hard couch.

The heavy, regular breathing of the worn-out man had long been heard; in her arm slumbered the child, its dear head leaning on her bosom; but the woman watched—watched through the long, dreary night—alone with her tears; and only when the dawn of the morning broke through the window, and a cold, chilly draught blew through the room, piercing to her limbs, which no covering protected, she dropped into a light, uneasy slumber.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURE.

At Adelaide, close to the little river Torrens, separated from it by the wide road and a small strip of meadow land, on which still stood a few solitary gum-trees, was situated the snug dwelling of the joiner, Christian Helling, our old acquaintance.

The house was small, but well laid out; and a garden—something rather unusual in the town—kept with great care and industry, gave it a very snug and comfortable appearance. The passion-flowers and creeping vine contrasted favourably with the bare, whitewashed walls of the neighbouring houses.

The owner, Christian Helling, was one of those instances of German industry, and German perseverance and frugality, which have helped to make the United States what they are, and which, in their own country, in spite of enormous rates and taxes, in spite of the crushing weight of a host of *employés* and priests, still succeed, by means of this industry, this frugality, in making a stand against all difficulties, and, although unable to make progress against this strong current, obstinately to maintain their ground.

At the same time, like thousands of his class, Christian was totally indifferent to intellectual embellishments. Brought up piously and in the fear of God, he could just read the Bible, knew his catechism by heart as well as when he used to go to school, and on Sundays would not only sing his allotted number of verses, but would also sleep pretty regularly during the sermon, like thousands more. Nevertheless, he never missed divine service. At the same time, unlike many thousands, although he heard but little of the sermon itself, he followed the pious and good teaching given from the pulpit; and a more honest, straightforward man was not to be found in the colonies.

He cared for little else. He had never troubled himself much about politics, and now he thought they did not concern him at all, living under a more liberal government, where every individual citizen has not only the right but even the duty to *think* for himself. Of this liberty he availed himself but little.

Like old Lischke, who in this matter was his example, he left all this sort of thing, as he expressed himself, to "idlers who had nothing else to do." He never read any papers, or at most only the advertisements—of course, subscribed to none, and his library consisted of a Bible, a psalm-book, a catechism, and a few German and English tracts, which had been given to him by clergymen. An old volume of the "Illustrated Penny Magazine," which he had taken in payment of a bad debt, had accidentally found its way among the books men-

tioned; and now and then of an evening he spent an hour over the same old stories, the same engravings; and thus occupied he usually fell asleep.

Strangely enough, he associated with a character the very opposite of his own. It very frequently happens, that men apparently least suited to each other suit each other best.

Christian's house was small. He had built a small place in the garden, which he used as a workshop. His timber-yard consisted of the meadow before his house, which was Government land; and the upper story of his small house was let for a moderate rent to Oscar Von Pick, for whom Christian also provided the usual morning meal.

Oscar Von Pick had been formerly—so it was said at Adelaide—a lieutenant in the cavalry. He certainly was a good horseman, and when he found a genial spirit, would spend whole evenings talking about horseflesh. But, whatever might have been the cause of his leaving the old country—and on this subject reports were various—he could not follow his old profession, and was obliged to think of some means of gaining a livelihood.

There was plenty of work to be had in the young and rising colony, and any one willing to set-to and to live somewhat frugally had no cause to be in dread of want, not even for a single day. But *setting-to* was the worst part of it; *work* was wanted, and this was something to which Mr. Von Pick neither could nor would make up his mind.

There are unfortunately to be found in all colonies, and in all parts of the world, a number of men belonging to the so-called "educated classes," whose education or inclination renders them unfit for manual labour. I say the *so-called* educated classes, for thousands of them never had more than the most superficial school education, by which they perhaps profited but little. Brought up in the privileged circle, they have been accustomed from their youth upwards to look down upon the working classes as a completely inferior caste. Even in emigrating, they repel the thought as long as possible of being thrown into a career where they would have the same start as the hitherto despised class. It is only when they have reached the foreign country, when the race really commences, they find to their astonishment that they cannot continue mere spectators of this life, and run along looking at it in their carriage, but that they must take an

active part, if they will not be left far behind by their despised and low-bred rivals.

Many gird up their loins for the conflict; others seek to put off the evil day, till their means are exhausted, their credit ruined, and then endeavour by starts and jumps, and all possible manœuvres and experiments, to make up for the lost time and opportunity. That this does not lead them to the goal, they usually are forced to acknowledge when too late, and—what cannot swim must sink.

To this class most noblemen, lawyers, young merchants without means, artists, authors, &c. &c., belong. An irregular, adventurous kind of existence which they lead for some time, is only a short respite, which keeps them a little longer afloat.

Mr. Oscar Von Pick belonged to this class, and was indeed one of the few who succeed in deceiving their neighbours about themselves and their circumstances longer than generally happens. Endowed with easy, gentlemanly manners and a small capital, he commenced life in South Australia. By means of a few bets, and some other lucky although insignificant speculations, which he took care to keep very secret, he managed to mislead his countrymen, and also his English neighbours, so far that they thought he had resources at home. If he gained nothing else by this false view of his circumstances, he still kept up a certain although limited credit; and to work it out in all directions had been his endeavour during the last few years. The belief that at some time fortune would favour him in a particular manner he shared with all his class, knowing very well he had little to expect from a regular course of events; and in this expectation he lived free from cares and troubles.

Being a pretty good judge of horseflesh, and knowing all the tricks and deceits practised by jockeys in all countries, and called by them "innocent deceptions," although neither more nor less than common swindling, he managed to purchase horses to advantage, and to get rid of many an inferior animal at a good price. Horse-dealing provided him from time to time with cash for his most pressing wants. In addition to this, he carried on, like a great many more, the profession of a broker, from which he hoped to reap, particularly in the corn trade, considerable profits.

Of course, he had no capital to pay for the corn; but "Mr.

Von Pick," with a very becoming coat and manners, found no difficulty in imposing upon many of his simple-minded countrymen. Many of them had brought out of their native country the habit of bowing to a better sort of a coat, and particularly to a noble name, and, moreover, to feel themselves mightily honoured by such business connexions; and Pick had lately succeeded remarkably well in buying up a considerable quantity of flour and corn, merely for his bills of exchange. A rise in the price was expected, and a few hundred pounds might thus have been very easily gained.

Such speculations, however, are dangerous: the result is seldom in the hands of man, and mostly depends on unforeseen circumstances. A man who has a considerable capital may pretty confidently hazard part of it in such speculations. He can, if the thing fails, hope that another may succeed, and thus cover the loss of the former; but he who stakes his all upon one card always plays a dangerous game. Gain only takes him one step farther in advance—loss destroys all his prospects at a blow.

Nevertheless, Mr. Von Pick had gambled in this manner. Things had come to a crisis with him, when, if fortune did not prove favourable, all must be lost. Nothing less than complete ruin, or better, perhaps, the loss of his last credit—for of real possessions he had long had nothing to lose—stared him in the face.

Fortune is a strange divinity, and can seldom be compelled to smile; and Mr. Von Pick was doomed to learn, on the morning at which our history has now arrived, that she had played him a sad trick, in spite of his clear and evident calculations of gain.

He was alone in his apartment, tastefully furnished on credit. The coffee stood upon the table, and Mr. Von Pick, smoking a cigar, paced up and down the small room with hasty strides. A crumpled letter lay upon the floor, and beside it a richly-embroidered skull-cap, with a golden tassel—a secret gift from Susanna.

"It has come at last!" he groaned, throwing himself on the sofa, crossing his legs, and passing his right hand through his disordered locks; "at last the mine has burst, the ship has sunk; and here I am, stuck in this cursed country as fast and firmly on the dry sand as if I had never been afloat. A pretty business!" he exclaimed, after a short pause, making

a movement to pick up the letter lying before him. He opened it again, and once more, with knit brows and set teeth, ran over the lines announcing the ill-fated news, "Plague and pestilence!—why the devil must the ships come in just now? Of course, for the last three months, nothing but east wind, east wind, east wind—nothing but this abominable accursed east wind!—one could almost be certain to a day when we should get these supplies. It really seems as if one were sometimes struck with blindness; and that old ass, that Lischke, was right in selling his corn at pretty high prices. It was fortunate he would not give me credit, or I should have had that trash upon my hands too at present."

He again crushed the letter, threw it into the corner, and puffed at his cigar with so much rage and violence that the thick smoke formed a regular cloud round him and entirely concealed him.

A low knock was heard at the door. The first time Von Pick did not even hear, lost as he was in his own unpleasant thoughts: a louder knock attracted his attention, and at his not very friendly "Come in!" the door opened slowly, and Christian's good-natured face became visible.

"Hallo, Mr. Von Pick!" he said, laughing, at last, but not without difficulty, discovering his lodger amidst the cloud of smoke; "you smoke at a pretty good rate this morning. I thought at first you had visitors, as I heard you talking; but when all was quiet again, I thought I might as well try my luck."

"Ah! good morning, dear Helling," said Von Pick, making a violent effort to collect himself, and at the same time attempting to dissipate the tobacco-cloud by fanning it with his hand. It would not do to allow his landlord to suspect the state of his affairs. "How can I be of use to you?"

"Oh, it was only a trifle I wished to ask of you," said Helling, with embarrassment; "but perhaps I come at an inopportune moment. You seem ill-disposed."

"Who?—I?" exclaimed Von Pick, laughing. "What makes you think so? Why should I be badly disposed?"

"Well, I thought perhaps about Johnson," said Christian, laughing; "but do not take such a thing to heart. Indeed, you should be glad to have got rid of the fellow at such an

easy rate. He was one of the right sort of humbugs, and his chief object was to cheat other people."

"Johnson!—what do you mean about Johnson?" said Pick, quickly, and with an expression of fear; "have you heard anything of him?"

"Why, have you not heard the news?" asked Christian, with astonishment.

"I?—not a word. What has happened?"

"Johnson has cut."

"What Johnson?"

"What Johnson?—why, the 'Coal Johnson,' as they called him in town," said Christian, smiling. "But no one, from the first moment he came here, expected anything else of him. Indeed, he is said to have played the same tricks at Sydney and Melbourne. The only thing I was afraid of was lest you might have committed yourself with him. You know I warned you frequently about this man and his plans."

"Run away?" repeated Von Pick, with great coolness, and smiling. "He is merely gone into the mountains to make further investigations about his discovery. We had intended to take the trip together; but no doubt he thought that he could do the business much more quietly alone: he would, moreover, be less exposed to the danger of being watched by some inquisitive people."

"Well, I fancy he will not find many coals out at sea," said Christian, laughing.

"Out at sea?" exclaimed Pick, with dismay. "You do not mean to say that he has gone to sea?"

"Certainly I do," replied the young man. "He went away last evening in the English schooner *Judith;* and his landlord, tailor, shoemaker, and other tradesmen repaired to the port this morning to see whether perchance they might not intercept him lower down. However, it would be of little use to them: he is not likely to have much money upon him, and I don't see what they can do to him. I hope you have not lent him any money?"

"Who?—I?" Von Pick exclaimed, with a forced smile. "No, I should say not. We are not so green, either. Still, I did not expect that Johnson would have acted thus; he seemed a very decent, respectable man."

"I never considered him as such," replied honest Christian. "I am glad he has left this place. Such fellows only create

mischief in a country, whether they are Englishmen or Germans, and are the cause of rendering even honest men distrusted. But," he added, with evident hesitation, "it was not to tell you this that I came up. I thought you had heard of it all long ago. I came about something else. I—I have received a letter, Mr. Von Pick."

"A letter!" exclaimed the young man; and it was well Christian was so engaged with his own affairs, otherwise it could hardly have escaped his notice that his tenant felt much more interested in the news than one might have reasonably expected.

"Yes," replied Christian, smiling and blushing—"a very nice letter. I have been expecting it for the last few days. It is written somewhat illegibly, and I came to ask you to be so kind as to read it for me."

"With the greatest pleasure," answered Von Pick, readily.

"Yes," continued Christian; "but I must first tell you who it comes from."

"I suppose I shall see that in the letter itself," replied his tenant, who had by this time completely regained his self-possession.

"Yes—very probably," observed Christian; "the name stands below; but——"

"But?"

"My dear Mr. Von Pick," Christian said, firmly and openly, "I must first tell you something about it, for I shall make you, to a certain extent, my confidant."

"You do me too much honour!" replied Von Pick, with an equivocal smile. It was, however, lost upon Christian. The latter having once started, continued quietly,—

"I intend to marry. When a man has commenced business, he ought not to remain single; and I have, therefore, asked Father Lischke for the hand of his daughter. You know Susanna Lischke?"

"Yes," replied Von Pick, not without some confusion; "she is a very pretty girl!"

"And, what is better, she is an industrious, kind-hearted girl," said Christian; "and to-day I have received the answer to my proposal."

"Which you cannot read," Von Pick observed, somewhat maliciously.

"Yes; and this is the first time I have had cause to regret

my deficiency in that respect," replied Christian, with a deep blush. "I do, indeed, feel sorry that my parents were not in a position to give me a better education. But," he added, firmly, "that does not signify. It is not yet too late, and, with industry and perseverance, I may perhaps overcome this defect."

"And the letter?"

"I wished to ask you to read it to me," said Christian. "I can make out pretty well what she says; but I should like to know exactly. Of course you will not say a word to any one about the contents?"

"My dear Helling," replied Von Pick, smiling, "I thought you knew me well enough to be assured of that. It is a matter which does not concern any one else, and two are quite enough to know it. Where is the letter?"

Christian said nothing further. He drew the letter from his pocket and gave it to Von Pick. The seal had been broken open, and the letter folded again, and no doubt Christian had been studying it for some time. Von Pick opened it, and glanced hastily at the contents. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR CHRISTIAN,—I promised to send you an answer, and keep my word. This evening I am asked to Dr. Spiegel's; but to-morrow I shall be at home with my parents. We shall have supper at eight. Father wishes you to come. Yours very sincerely, SUSANNA."

"Well!" said Christian, anxiously, his looks hanging upon the lips of his tenant.

"I congratulate you," replied Von Pick, smiling, after having read it, in a loud and slow voice. "Do you want more? An invitation from your future father and mother-in-law."

Christian's countenance was radiant with bliss; he took the letter again, once more examined, with sparkling eyes, the characters, which he had not been able to decipher, folded the precious document, took Von Pick by the hand, which he shook heartily, saying,—

"I am infinitely obliged to you. You have procured me a great pleasure; and I'll tell you what—I do not feel inclined to work any more, and should like to celebrate the happy day. Let us keep it like a Sunday; it will be the most important

in my life. Do me the favour, then, to dine with me to-day."

"But, my dear Helling—" replied Von Pick, somewhat embarrassed.

"I should like to have a bottle of wine to-day," continued the young workman, growing warmer—"right good wine, or, perhaps, even two. Besides, I must get up my courage for to-morrow evening," he added, with a good-natured smile, "and one can have no pleasure alone. I must have a companion, with whom I can speak without restraint, and who, at the same time, understands why I am so happy. Well, will you be my guest to-day?"

"With pleasure," answered Von Pick, shaking the proffered hand. Upon principle, he never let an opportunity slip of drinking a good glass of wine.

"That's right!" replied Christian, with much satisfaction. "I shall go down and give the necessary orders. At twelve o'clock I will fetch you. Will that suit you?"

On receiving an answer in the affirmative, he turned round, and, with his heart full of bliss and happiness, left the room.

His tenant was not, however, equally satisfied and tranquil. Long after the sound of Christian's retiring steps had died away on the narrow, creaking stairs, Von Pick stood as he had left him, in the middle of the room, with his arms crossed upon his breast. The friendly smile that played upon his lips in the presence of his landlord had disappeared, and had been replaced by a gloomy, almost ominous earnestness. Wild, fearful thoughts filled his head—mad plans and ideas kept crossing each other.

"This is a pretty business," he muttered at last, with a dark expression. "I have got into a nice mess! This was the only thing required to crown my misfortune. Johnson has disappeared, and has taken my last pound. What is to be done? The business at Lischke's seems at the same time to be progressing terribly fast, and I am almost afraid it is my own hurry which is the cause of it. At any rate, it is a bad sign that the fellow should be invited so soon. Susanna, of course, will keep her word. A cunning creature she is;—how she leads this bumpkin about by the nose! But what will she say when she hears that my affairs altogether have taken a turn which I little anticipated? After all, she must know it some day, sooner or later. This is my last hope," he added,

in a decided tone;—"old Lischke has money, lots of money; and if once I am his son-in-law, I shall make him come down with the cash,—will he, nill he! What a true prophet the old rascal has proved with reference to this coal business; and this swindler, this Johnson—one cannot trust one's own brother!"

Uttering these words in an angry tone, Mr. Von Pick paced up and down his room for some time. He had certainly managed to get himself into a difficulty. His engagement with Susanna, timely as it was in some measure, was a source of perplexity. What if he should not be able to procure the necessary sum for the most pressing expenses! He had himself spoiled his game with Dr. Spiegel. The doctor was certainly credulous enough, but even Pick doubted whether he would submit to be laid under contribution a second time, after the seeming failure of the coal business. The merchants in Adelaide all knew that he had bought corn: indeed, he owed most of them money. What of the new-comer, the Dr. Schreiber? He was hardly sufficiently acquainted with him to venture; moreover, there was something earnest and distant in his manner which did not altogether please Christian. Here was a chance! After dinner, when the young man was under the excitement of wine, would be the time to make the attempt. Mr. Von Pick gave a low laugh at the idea. There was something comical in it; it would, indeed, be glorious for the supposed bridegroom to defray the marriage expenses of another man with his own bride!

Mr. Von Pick rubbed his hands with satisfaction, and commenced his toilet. His eye fell upon the letter which lay crumpled up in the corner of the room, by which all his hopes had been dissipated. His good humour vanished, and uttering a few curses, he locked the letter up in his desk, dressed, and left the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONVICT.

In spite of the crisis in his affairs, Mr. Von Pick was punctual to the hour appointed by his landlord. In addition to a bottle of good wine, he hoped to gain other objects.

It will be necessary for us now to leave the two men to themselves, and to return once more to the wretched dwelling occupied by the Hohburgs, where the husband so recently found had been lying, for two days, in a dangerous fever. His recent excesses, together with the agitation, shame, and remorse that ensued upon discovering his wife, had been too much for the man's enfeebled constitution, and he was seized with delirium tremens. His wife tended him with the patience of an angel, pacifying the child, already afraid of its father, and cooling the burning temples—the dry, parched lips of the patient. As in his ravings he called for brandy to quench his burning thirst, she knelt, trembling, at the side of the bed, and prayers and tears relieved her oppressed heart and mitigated her grief.

Towards evening on the second day he recovered his senses, slept quietly during the night, and on the third day he felt himself strengthened anew, and delivered from his torments. This fit of illness, brought on by nothing but excessive drinking, abated for a time; but in order to prevent a relapse, it was necessary for him to give up drinking for ever. Temperance alone, and a regular, sober life, would entirely cure this fearful evil, and prevent it from at last destroying the ill-used body.

The patient seemed restored, and, with tears in his eyes, he thanked his poor wife for her love and gentleness; yet the ravings he uttered during his fever had left a painful impression upon her mind. Strange words had escaped the lips of the sick man: in his ravings he had accused himself of a crime. Naturally, the poor woman, watching in care and anxiety by his bed-side, could not clearly understand the accusation, which filled her heart with fresh anguish.

When her husband recovered his senses, she requested to know what it was that weighed upon his mind, and gave his dreams that fearful and horrible colouring.

With downcast eyes and pale cheeks he listened to her words. He dare not meet her gaze, and the question was evidently a source of perplexity and vexation.

"I do not know what you mean," he whispered, in a low voice; "anything I may have said in my fever was but madness. It could not be worth remembering."

"There was something in it, Edward," replied his wife, standing before him with her hands folded,—"there was

some meaning in your words. Again and again your thoughts returned to the same point—blood! Good God, if such a stain should rest upon your soul! Can it be possible that, in the bush, you have not only indulged in your passion for drink, but have also become a murderer?"

"Do not grieve your heart with unnecessary anguish," her husband replied, gloomily. "If you knew all that I had suffered in the bush—the torments and the remorse—you would not wonder at the fancies of my fever. It is natural enough that all the scenes I had witnessed there should become confounded together in my dreams. But will you believe the words I uttered when asleep and in delirium sooner than those I now speak, awake and well?"

"Let it be so," replied his wife, in a sad, resigned voice. "Although I have the right to ask to share and help you to bear any weight that may press upon your mind, I cannot force you to make me your confidante; I will not urge the matter further. I will joyfully believe that my fears were unfounded. God grant that you may have abandoned your former mode of life, and that you may begin a new one from this day! I only ask you one thing: it is a question you must answer; for it concerns not only you, but your child—myself—the destiny of all of us; and that question is; what is to become of you—what are your plans—what will you do to support yourself?"

"Louisa!" muttered the man.

"I do not ask on my own account," his wife continued, quickly interrupting him. "I have long supported myself and child, and can do so still, and will do so, as long as God grants me health and strength. I ask on your account. To do justice to yourself, you *must* take to some occupation, to earn at least sufficient to maintain yourself. Australia affords plenty of opportunities in all directions," she continued, more warmly; "and I should be the last to ask you to begin with any laborious toil which your enfeebled body would not bear. You require rest in order to recover your powers. Nor need you commence at once," she said, in a tone of kindness. "Repose for a few days, and accustom yourself to the idea of being amongst your own, in your own home. But at the same time, do not forget that you *cannot* continue to live as you have done hitherto; that you must not only think of yourself, but also of your child, and endeavour to improve its

position and to rescue it from present *misery* and abject poverty."

Hohburg hid his face in his hands, and his wife watched him for some time in silence and pain; then she continued slowly and sadly:

"Yes, the *misery*, Edward—I cannot spare you the expression, however I may myself suffer in using it—the bitter misery—for you do not know the thousandth part of the suffering you brought upon me and your child by leaving us thus. For some time after your flight I was ill, and had it not been for the kindness of my neighbours, who discovered, however, though rather late, that we were in want, we should have died of hunger in this wilderness. This is past now," she added, quickly, on seeing what a fearful impression her words made upon the unfortunate man; "it is past and forgotten; but it was necessary you should *know* the truth; and I hope it will be a warning to you, though a bitter one, so that you may nerve your mind to strengthen present good intentions. The thought of what we suffered—of your child—will best protect you from a relapse."

"But what can I do?" said Hohburg, in a voice stifled with sobs; "what can I expect with my strength, and who will employ me in such a state? My clothes are worn out and in tatters. I fear there can be but one resource for me, namely, to return to the bush, however horrible that life may be."

"No, you shall not do that," replied his wife, in a quiet and determined manner. "If you are willing to work, you will find plenty of chances of employment in the settlement itself. To-morrow I will speak to Mr. Lischke about the matter; he is a most upright, and at the same time practical man. He calls things by their right names, takes them in hand in the right manner, and has assisted many a one actuated by real and earnest desires of doing good. He is always ready with advice and assistance when he knows they are wanted. He will do anything he can for me, as I think that I stand well in his opinion. If I seek his aid, he will not refuse it; and when you have once commenced, you will soon be able to get on by yourself. First of all, you must procure new clothes," she added, in a more cheerful manner. "You are right; in your present garments, you could not ask any one for work or employment. You must look

respectable, or else people will have but little confidence in you."

"But I have——" muttered the man, with a deep blush.

"I know," said his wife, interrupting him: "I have sufficient left to be enabled to assist you. I have laid by a trifling sum for myself and our child, that we might not be exposed to danger and want as we once were before. There, take this!" she added, cheerfully, going to the chest and fetching a bag, containing about twenty shillings in silver: "this will be sufficient to procure a few necessary and plain clothes."

"Must I go into the town in these rags?" asked Hohburg, pressing her hand, with a thankful look and tears in his eyes.

"You need not go so far," replied his wife. "Not quite half an hour's walk from this, if you follow the wide road on your left, and keep between the fences, you will come to a small shop, where cheap clothing is sold. But you must reserve enough of the money to bring back a loaf of bread. I have not a morsel in the house for the child's supper. You will have enough money, for clothes of this description are extremely cheap here. But will you be able to go?" she said, suddenly; "you look weak and exhausted. Wait until to-morrow, and rest to-day. I can go myself to fetch the bread."

"No, my child," replied Hohburg, putting on his hat; "I am strong enough, and the fresh air will do me good. Oh, Louisa, how shall I reward your kindness? But I see no end to this misery."

"If you despair," said his wife, gravely, "it will be bad indeed. But, thank God! we have not sunk so low yet, and by industry and economy, may rise in the world. My only desire is to save a little capital, say thirty or forty pounds, to commence a small business in town. If I once gained so much, I should get on well, and make money. At any rate, we must go and live in town in a few years; that is to say, as soon as Lizzy is old enough to attend school. Alone it would have been hard for me to have saved so much, and would have taken many, many years; but if you help me, and apply yourself, we shall succeed much quicker. You see, Edward, I have much better hopes of you than you have

yourself, and expect more from you than you do yourself; and, indeed, you ought to give me courage."

"Thirty pounds," said Hohburg, in a low, sorrowful voice, thinking of what we had wasted in the bush and thrown away in drink. His wife seemed to consider that sum as the highest aim of her ambition. "Thirty pounds! how little it is considered here, and how long it will take to save it!"

"If we once begin to save," said his wife, cheerfully, not wishing to pain him more than necessary, "the rest will soon follow. Perhaps you may get an appointment where you can save this sum in one year. You write a beautiful hand, and you know several languages; and such men are not to be found everywhere, and they are frequently wanted. When you were away, old Mr. Gillmore was more than six months looking out for such a person. It may not be too late for you to find employment with him. At any rate, it will do no harm to inquire; he has extensive possessions, and employs a great number of people. But you must go now, Edward, or else the shop will have closed; and when Lizzy wakes and wants something to eat I shall have nothing for her."

"Good-bye, Louisa," said Hohburg, cheerfully, for the first time looking at her full in the face, and squeezing her hand; "I hope you will see me a new man!"

"God grant it!" replied his wife, with a deep sigh; and she stood long in the door following her husband with her eyes, until a bend in the road hid him from her sight."

An hour elapsed. Lizzy awoke and asked after her father. Her mother told her he had gone to fetch some bread.

The child's eyes sparkled at this piece of news.

"You see, mamma," she said, running to her mother and throwing her little arms round her neck, "you see how kind papa is, and he keeps the promise he gave when he went away, that he wanted to get bread for us?"

"Yes, my child," replied the mother; but a peculiar and almost inexplicable feeling of sadness oppressed her heart. Was she pained at the child's innocent delusion? Did she lament that the poor girl considered her father better than he really was?

"Papa is coming back," suddenly exclaimed the little one, who had gone to the door to look out for him. Her mother followed her quickly, but a single glance showed her it was not her husband, but a stranger.

"Not yet, Lizzy," she said; "he could scarcely have come back so soon. It is a long way, and poor papa is still weak and ill from the effects of his long journey."

"May I go and meet him, and help him to carry the bread?" asked the child.

"Wait a little, my dear," answered her mother; "we will both go and meet him as soon as we see him coming."

As she saw the stranger approaching, she retired into the house until he should have passed. When he reached the door he stood still in the middle of the road, apparently seek for something. His looks were directed towards the small house, until at last he seemed to have made up his mind, and walked towards it.

The woman, believing him to be a stranger who had missed his way among the numerous fences and bushes, went to the door to give any directions he might require. However, on recognising the gentleman who had spoken to her at Lischke's, and taken a kind interest in her, she blushed slightly.

"I see I am right, after all," said the stranger, whom she knew by the name of Dr. Schreiber. "I was almost afraid I had missed the way. I wish you a very good day, Mrs. Hohburg!"

"Were you looking for me?" said the woman, as a deeper blush suffused her cheeks. In her surprise, she forgot to return the greeting.

"Yes," said M'Donald, looking at her with an open and frank countenance; "I am partly commissioned to do so by my kind host, who was afraid something had happened to you, as you have not been heard of for several days; and also—and I see no reason why I should deny it—on my own account. You will not be angry when I assure you that it is not curiosity, but a far better feeling, which induces me to seek you. I must, however, put a question, which may perhaps seem indiscreet."

"I do not understand," muttered the woman.

M'Donald, who had in the meantime examined her features, interrupted her.

"The more I look at you," he said, "the more the conviction forces itself upon me that a strange destiny has brought together two persons whose days were once destined to flow peaceably, side by side, in their native country. You do *not* come from Thüringen?"

Every drop of blood forsook her cheeks, but she did not reply. M'Donald continued, after a short pause—

"Will you allow me to sit down here for a short time? This bench offers sufficient shade, and I shall perhaps be able in a few words, from the history of my life, to solve the problem of my apparent intrusion. Will you listen to me?"

"Speak," said the woman, in a trembling and scarcely audible voice, drawing her child close to her, and sitting down upon the bench as M'Donald took his station at the opposite end. He looked at her for a minute in silence, then said, suddenly,—

"No! I am *not* mistaken—I cannot be mistaken—you are Edward Hohburg's wife! My name is M'Donald!"

"Good God!" cried the woman, starting from her seat in surprise and dismay. M'Donald motioned to her to resume her seat, but this was not needed. The shock was too great for her, and she sank down on her place, concealing her face in the bosom of the child.

"I was right, then," M'Donald continued, in a low voice. "This name awakens but too many old recollections in you, recollections mixed with horror, at the man who is sitting at your side. Although the world has condemned him, he is not himself conscious of having committed a bad or wicked deed. This makes me feel the more anxious to unburthen my heart to you. It is terrible to have *no one* to whom to tell one's sorrow—who can understand one's grief. You do not know the feelings of such an unfortunate man, thrust into the world alone in grief and sorrow, while disgrace and shame are heaped upon his head, and there is no one to share his anguish—no friend to speak a word of consolation, to raise and cheer his drooping soul."

"Oh, I know it but too well!" muttered the woman, in a sad and scarcely audible voice.

M'Donald gazed at her with astonishment.

"Then what Lischke tells me about your husband is true; everything that surrounds you, the work you are forced to—"

"Pray go on," she begged of him, stretching her hand towards him. "I did not complain."

There was such a profound sorrow, but at the same time such a calm rebuke, in the expression which accompanied these few syllables, that M'Donald was confused, and remained

silent. He felt he had offended her, but also perceived that an apology would only probe the wound he had incautiously touched; and, after a short hesitation, he continued—

"My name must yet remain a secret between us. Condemned by the English laws, I have been transported to Australia as a convict, and have escaped."

"You are—"

"A bushranger," said the unfortunate man, with a bitter smile; "at least, as the authorities here call it—a fugitive, on whose head a price is set; and in revealing myself to you I am impelled by something I cannot myself explain. Nearly nine years ago," he continued, after a short pause, in a calm voice, "a German family of the name of Hohburg lived in Edinburgh. In their house I found a second home; in their family circle my heart discovered the realization of its wishes. I take it for granted that those circumstances are well known to you, although I only met you once, and that was just before that unfortunate evening. You arrived only a short time before from Germany. I loved Mary, and knew she returned my affection. Although there was not the slightest similarity in our characters, Edward Hohburg became my friend. Edward was of the kindest disposition—quiet, and even vacillating. Upon his arrival in the strange country, he commenced many a scheme, and afterwards abandoned it only because he could not reconcile himself to the manners and customs of the inhabitants. I endeavoured to guide him in the right path; and as I warned him against his own errors, and he saw how sincerely I meant what I said, he became still more attached to me. I considered myself happy. At that time a young Irishman, whose acquaintance Hohburg made through me, visited the Hohburg family a good deal. At his first appearance peace fled from the house. He was young, handsome, and rich; and it soon became evident that he was not insensible to Mary's charms. Although he knew in what position I stood towards the family—how much more closely allied to them I expected shortly to became—he offered his hand to her, and was refused. Edward told him such would be the case before he made the offer, and he did all in his power to induce him to desist. Then he sought to comfort him, and was more than ever in his company. Some time passed, and O'Rourke, as the Irishman was called, seemed to have buried his anger at what had

passed. One evening, Edward visited us, with several other friends. It was to be a feast of reconciliation. There was much drinking: we all of us became heated and excited; but with O'Rourke an evil and ominous change took place under the influence of the wine. In spite of all our efforts to prevent him, he again and again turned the conversation upon Mary, and words escaped his lips which at last neither Edward nor I could or would bear. Edward in particular, whom scarcely anything could rouse out of his tranquillity and equanimity, trembled with rage; and indeed, as I afterwards heard, the consequence brought on a violent fever, which confined him to his bed for many months. At last I asked this Irishman for an explanation. Instead of giving it, he added insult to insult; and, unable any longer to control myself, I dashed the glass which stood before me in his face. Of course he was obliged to demand satisfaction, and the following morning was to decide our quarrel.

"Immediately after this scene I quitted the room, and all the company went away. I went out into the garden to cool myself a little, and was on the point of returning into the house to make the necessary arrangements for the following day. Suddenly I heard the report of fire-arms, and when, impelled by an irresistible impulse, I hastened to the spot whence it proceeded, I was caught in the bushes, and in that condition suddenly surrounded, seized, and accused of murder. Not far from that spot O'Rourke lay, bathed in his blood. An empty pistol was found the following day between the spot where I had been apprehended and that where he was lying, and I was accused of murder."

"Fearful!" exclaimed the woman.

"I defended myself; I averred my innocence," said M'Donald, wiping the drops from off his forehead: "all was of no avail! I was said to have uttered terrible threats a short time before against the murdered man. Nothing appeared to the public more likely than that we had met in the garden. It was still possible that O'Rourke might have laid violent hands upon himself, and immediately after the shot—(the bullet had penetrated his heart)—thrown away the pistol; yet there was something very unlikely in that. The idea of suicide was, moreover, rejected, from the shot having entered the side under the arm, and the jury pronounced me guilty. The punishment was in some degree lessened, because the deed was

supposed to have taken place whilst I was under the influence of wine; and instead of death at the hangman's hand, my sentence was fourteen years' transportation.

"The rest you know," continued M'Donald, in a low voice. "Mary died of a broken heart before I was transported; this news was the farewell with which my native country thrust me abroad into a dungeon and misery. I lost pride, house, wealth, freedom—all at one blow—and left my country branded as a criminal."

"And you *were* innocent?" cried the woman, looking up to him with a pale and fearful countenance.

"As truly as the sun sinks in the west—as truly as a God dwells above us, and sees any heart, and knows whether I speak truth or falsehood."

The woman did not reply. A shiver passed through her limbs, and, shuddering, she hid her face in her hands.

"For years," continued M'Donald, his eyes lighted up by a strange fire, "I endured this fearful imprisonment. For years I worked side by side with criminals, who, grown up in sin and shame, had nothing but derision and mockery for the unfortunate man who would not adapt himself to their coarse, revolting habits. Still I was supported by the hope that my innocence must some day be established—that it could not be the will of God to load the innocent man with such fearful, undeserved punishment. Year after year passed away, and as at last the coarse ill-usage of brutal gaolers and overseers increased, despair got the mastery over my heart. I determined no longer to bear such misery, but to escape into the bush, as many had done. How I managed this is now of no consequence; for some time I lived in a small German place of this district as a physician, and earned more than I needed, until my own recklessness or my fate delivered me again into the hands of my enemies. Fortunately, I had concealed my money, and for the second time I escaped from their clutches. They are already stretched out towards me; and once they nearly caught me again. Hunted down like a wild animal, I again sought refuge among Germans, as the deer runs among the peaceful herd to throw the bloodhounds off its tracks. Should I be driven from this, my last refuge, I should have no resource but to sell my life as dearly as possible, for I would never fall alive into their hands."

"Have you taken no steps to establish your innocence?"

asked the woman, trembling: "has not the real criminal been discovered?"

"Much has been done, but all in vain," replied M'Donald, sadly. "My brother, who still lives in London, has done all he could to clear up the mystery which envelops this deed. Suspicion still rests upon me, and will continue to rest upon me, from the unfortunate circumstances of that fatal night. I do not accuse my judges; the jury could scarcely have pronounced a different verdict: yet it was false. The only possible explanation is that O'Rourke, in a fit of repentance, and stung by remorse, laid violent hands upon himself. But the lips which alone could testify my innocence are cold. The blood—— But no more of these useless complaints," he said, suddenly. "It was not to bewail my lot that I came here. I am accustomed to bear and brave it. No; the name which I heard among these Germans awoke again the memory of those happy times. Your features revived the images of those days; and I determined first to assure myself upon this point, and then to clear myself, at least before you, from the suspicion of being a worthless coward. I hope my aim has been attained. If I should again fall into the hands of my pursuers, and be forced to sell my life as dearly as possible, my defence remains in your keeping; if you should return to happy England, clear my memory from the stain which rests upon it. Perhaps they will believe, when dead, that which I asserted in vain whilst alive."

"Does my husband—does Edward know that you are here?" asked the woman.

"Your husband? Edward?" M'Donald exclaimed, in astonishment. "Has he not gone away? Has he not disappeared in the bush, or is he not dead?"

"He returned," replied the woman, in a whisper, "a few days ago, and it was his illness which kept me at home."

"Where,—here?" the fugitive eagerly demanded.

"Not now, not to-day," said the woman, casting an anxious look down the road, and laying her pale, almost transparent hand on his arm. "He is gone to fetch something, and I expect him back every minute; but do me the kindness not to speak with him to-day; let me first prepare him to meet you. He is still ill and weak," she added, slowly, "and the shock would be too much for him."

M'Donald nodded acquiescence.

"In earlier times it would have been very different," he

added, with a bitter smile; "and I cannot blame him. He must, after all, consider me as the murderer, however indirect, of his sister, upon whom he had bestowed all his affection. His silence when I lay under the fearful accusation showed me that he considered me, if not guilty, at least capable of committing the deed."

"He will do all that lies in his power—" said the woman.

"He *cannot* do anything," M'Donald exclaimed. "I want no pardon. I am not cleared of the accusation; I do not desire to live as a pardoned criminal. What I wish is to convince his heart. The thought that Mary should have died believing in my guilt was particularly fearful to me; and that Mary's brother should consider me a cowardly murderer is also cruel. I feel I could meet my destiny with a light heart if this weight was removed from it. But this is not all," he added, after a short pause; "I have another request to make to you, madam. To speak the truth, this was the principal motive which led me to discover myself to you—although I had no fear of being betrayed by you."

"If the accomplishment of it is in my power."

"It is simply to forward a letter containing family matters, and which must be sent to its address only in case of my being taken again, or of my death. If found upon me, it would be opened. Into your hands alone I can entrust it. There is nothing in it," he continued, with a sad smile, as he saw that she took the letter with hesitation; "nothing that could be dangerous to you or any one else. It is only a will, and matters which concern no one but my brother, but which, on account of my brother, should not be seen by a stranger. Will you promise me faithfully to perform this commission in case you should hear of my death?"

"I promise," the woman replied, solemnly.

"I thank you sincerely," said M'Donald, as, for the first time, a joyful smile spread over his countenance, "and shall now meet the future, whatever it may have in store for me, without fear."

"But what do you intend doing," asked the woman, with alarm, "if the police get upon your tracks?"

"I can do nothing but remain here," said M'Donald, with a shrug of his shoulders. "My long residence in Germany, my continual intercourse in Scotland with Germans, has made me well acquainted with the German language, and I can pass for a German. I have, as far as possible, disguised my-

self; and if I can only live here undiscovered for a few months, I shall, perhaps, be able to return to Europe. At present it is scarcely possible, unless I should be able to evade the watchfulness of my pursuers at the port itself; but, at any rate, I shall make the attempt. Here I am, Dr. Schreiber, and have even got some practice in the neighbourhood."

"But will Lischke himself not betray you?" the woman asked. "He is a kind, honest man, but, at the same time, he entertains the greatest respect for the laws, and if he had the slightest suspicion that the police——"

"I know my German," said M'Donald, smiling; "and shall not lead him into temptation. He must not even suspect to whom he is giving hospitality. However, I have already taken apartments, to which I intend removing one of these days. There I shall be less disturbed, and safer. I see my presence makes you uneasy," he said, stopping short. "Farewell! You may, if you like, tell Edward, who is living in this very neighbourhood."

"Which road do you intend to take?" said the woman, who had grown more anxious during the last quarter of an hour, hoping, and at the same time fearing, her husband would come back. She did not wish the stranger, who had known him in better times, to meet him in his present wretched condition.

No one was passing along the road, save a German woodcutter, returning from Adelaide in his light car, and smoking his short pipe. He touched his cap, with a friendly "God be with you!" as he passed by, vainly endeavouring to urge his strange team—a horse and a cow—into a brisker pace.

"The road to Saaldorf," replied M'Donald. "I promised Dr. Spiegel to spend the evening with him, and must first call at Lischke's, whose daughter places herself under my escort."

"Then this will be your best way," said the woman, anxious, above all things, to prevent a meeting between the two men upon the road. "The third turning on your left will lead you straight to Lischke's house."

"I thank you—and the letter?"

"I have given you my word, and shall fulfil your commission."

M'Donald lingered, as if he wished to say something else. He opened his lips, and stretched his arm towards her, but

let it drop again, bowed, and went slowly in the direction which she had pointed out to him.

Just as he reached the turning, where, between two fields, a new road crossed the path, he perceived two horsemen coming towards him at a brisk trot. M'Donald saw at once that they belonged to the native police, and, to avoid meeting them, turned off to the left, and walked on slowly. He had not much fear of being recognised in his present disguise. His whole costume—short hair, shaven chin, blue spectacles—sufficiently altered him, particularly as the night was closing in. His thin boots left quite a different mark from the thick bush-boots. In spite of all this he did not wish to risk such a meeting, especially when he could avoid it without causing suspicion.

M'Donald had scarcely walked a hundred paces, when the two blacks reached the place where the roads crossed, stopped their horses, and followed the pedestrian with their eyes. But he was dressed too much like a townsman to induce them to take any further notice of him. After exchanging a few words they turned their horses' heads, rode slowly along the road by which the pedestrian had come, with their bodies bent forward, that they might be the better able to examine his tracks, and put spurs to their horses when they had satisfied themselves on this point.

M'Donald heard them stop. He did not turn his head towards them, but slowly pursued his way.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TEMPTER.

With the money given him by his wife, to buy himself some new clothes, Hohburg went slowly along the way pointed out to him, and soon perceived before him the small shop which formed the outer limit of Saaldorf in this direction. Paying but little heed to what was going on near him, and being occupied with his own sad thoughts, he had not noticed that, close to the roadside, bordered at this part by a small thicket of acacia trees, a man was sitting on the trunk of a gum-tree examining him attentively. He had

almost passed him, when a shout rooted him to the spot, and made him look round in astonishment.

"Hallo, mate!" shouted the man, with a blasphemous oath; "is it you, or is it not? Is it possible that Mr. Powell's hut-keepers should meet comfortably here?"

"Toby!" exclaimed Hohburg, much astonished to see at his side the man whom he had so shortly before left installed in his own berth on the Murray. He experienced a peculiar feeling of satisfaction that his successor should not have been able to retain the post. He knew very well that his own merit was not thereby enhanced, but at least it proved that others were no better than himself; and so degraded was he that even this satisfied him. Under any other circumstances he would either have turned away in disgust from the wild-looking red-haired fellow, or at least have broken off his conversation with him as soon as possible. But he felt anxious to hear the news of the station at which he had long been a servant. Besides, this was one to whom he need not look *up;* the presence of his noble wife had made him feel ashamed of himself, and crushed him to the ground; the rude fellow by his side raised him in his own imagination.

"What was going on there when you left the place, mate?" he asked, halting before him, and carefully examining him from head to foot. "You got enough of the service precious quick, it seems. Did the blacks pay the sheep another visit?"

Toby seemed to feel very uncomfortable under the scrutinizing gaze of the man. His question, however, furnished him at once with the best and simplest answer. He could easily imagine the German knew nothing of all that had taken place after his departure; and it was an easy thing for him to invent a very plausible tale.

"I think so, mate," he replied, laughing. "It was not long before the black rascals came again. The meal they made before, on the deuce knows how many kidneys, pleased them too well; and three nights afterwards they broke down the hurdles, and drove off every mortal animal. You can easily imagine the governor did not like that sort of thing. I was very stiff, too, and so, from one word to another, old Toby had to march off. Fortunately, I had received my wages, for the short period of service, in the shape of tobacco,

or else I should scarcely have got anything for my 'trouble,' as lawyers say. The missing sheep were deducted from your wages, no doubt?"

"Not one," Hohburg gravely replied; "old Powell is a worthy man."

"The devil! not one deducted!" Toby exclaimed, with astonishment; "well, that's right. Then you must be flush in cash, mate! or have the taverns already swallowed it as usual? However, that is no business of mine," he said, on seeing this question annoyed his companion. "At any rate, you have kept sufficient to treat an old mate to a glass of brandy and a bit of tobacco. One good turn deserves another, and who knows but I may render you a service some day."

The request was like a stab in Hohburg's heart. The money he had about him was not his own, and had been given to him for a different purpose. He neither could, nor would, refuse such a trifle to an old comrade who had slept in the bush under the same roof with him. He would have enough of the money left for this, he *must* have enough for it.

"I suppose you are short of cash, mate?" he said, turning towards Toby.

"Quite cleaned out," replied the latter, with a curse: "if I don't soon get into clover again, I may as well look out for a comfortable place to starve in. You have got another berth? If a fellow has any luck, all goes right with him."

"I!" replied Hohburg, in an absent manner. "I am just looking out for a situation, only there is not much to be made among the Germans."

"You are right there, my boy," said the Irishman, laughing; "they have themselves all come over to scrape together as much money as possible, and are as stingy as the devil. I don't intend spending much time here amongst them. All sorts of things are sold in yonder house, and I should not wonder if, with good management, one might not get a lot *very cheap*," he added, with a wink and a sharp look at his companion.

"Cheap?" returned the latter, not understanding the drift of the observation. "There is nothing cheap here. They mostly want good money for bad stuff."

"Hem!" said Toby, too cautious to meet the other more than half-way.

"But what has become of your gun?" asked the German,

remembering the good double-barrel which he carried about in the bush. "Have you sold that, too?"

"Necessity has no law," growled the Irishman, evasively, as they were walking side by side towards the shop, "and man must eat. Besides, it is not wanted here in the settlement; the roads are safe, and there are neither blacks nor bushrangers."

"The police caught a couple up there, I heard, at one of the stations on the Murray," said the German.

"Yes; there were a few about there," answered Toby, with indifference; "the swell, who came on a visit to Mr. Powell's, was one of them."

"The stranger who came out to the station with Mr. Powell!" exclaimed Hohburg, pausing with astonishment, and looking at his companion quite aghast.

"Yes, of course," replied the latter, quietly, without stopping; "it was the noted Jack Loudon, but, so far as I know, he gave them the slip again."

"Well, who would have imagined that? I heard afterwards they shot one of them."

"Oh, yes, he is lying in the Murray," said Toby, with a quiet laugh; "but here is the house," he added, stopping and examining the place irresolutely; "what if you went in, mate, and brought the stuff out here? I have lived so long in the bush that I have a regular dislike to roofs."

"Nonsense," returned Hohburg; "you are not afraid of going into a shop?"

"Afraid?" repeated Toby, casting a cautious look up and down the road; "why should I? But you are right," he added, taking a small flask out of his coat pocket. "I shall be able, at the same time, to inquire for work. Perhaps they want a barman, and I should like that place above all things. Just think, my boy, to stand the whole day by a full cask and hold the glass under the tap: what a jolly life that must be! I wonder I did not think of it before."

"Can you write?"

"Not very well; nothing more than my name," replied the fellow, with a laugh; "and it is so long since last I scrawled that down, that I really believe I have forgotten how to hold the pen. I should not be fit for the berth, after all; and, besides, I could not stay long cooped up between four walls."

"How do you do, gentlemen?" said the owner of the shop, coming to the door, without paying particular attention to the tattered appearance of the new arrivals. Most of the workmen from the bush were much the same in appearance, and they frequently had a good deal of money in their pockets.

"Hem!" said Toby, examining the man; "I know that face, unless I am much mistaken; and I fancy I once went a *sea-trip* with him."

"Johnny! by all the gum-trees of Australia!" exclaimed the shopkeeper, holding out his hand. "Where do you spring from, my boy, and how have you been this long while?"

"Not exactly Johnny, neither," he replied, with a quick glance at his companion, which was quite sufficient for his interlocutor. "My name used to be Toby; and I know no reason why I should change it."

"So it is; how stupid I am, old fellow," said the shopkeeper, taking the hint. "Hang it! such a lot of people come across one's path here, that one gets quite confused amongst the Bills, Johns, and Jacks. But where do you come from, and where are you going?"

"One of the questions is easy to answer," Toby answered, drily—"from the bush; the other depends upon circumstances."

"Ah! ah! gentlemen shepherds, who bring their money to the settlements," said the shopkeeper, laughing. "Well, what can I do for you?" he continued, going behind the counter, and, as a matter of course, producing two glasses and a bottle of brandy. "Pray help yourselves," he added; "every one knows his own weight and measure best. Well, Toby, *no* brandy?"

"I prefer Hollands," replied the latter, producing his small flask, and half filling it from a bottle of the required liqour. "Well, here is to your health, mate."

For a time Hohburg hesitated, looking wistfully at the bottle. The good that yet slumbered in him impelled him to eschew the seductive liquor altogether; but the consequence of his previous drunkenness, the ardent longing for spirituous liquors, which sometimes degenerated into uncontrollable desire, left him no peace. Had he gone into the shop alone, he might perhaps have mastered himself; but he

had not the power to resist the temptation of so many glittering bottles. "It is only for this once," he thought, filling his glass with a trembling hand; "I am weak, and require a little strength, and—it shall be the *last* time."

"You have not had your bitters to-day," said the shopkeeper, who was watching him. "Your hand is rather shaky. But this will set you all to rights: it is genuine and first-rate stuff. You might bring children up upon it."

"Do you keep tobacco, mate?" said Toby to the storekeeper.

"How do you think I could prosper without tobacco?" he said, with a laugh. "The boys from the bush would knock the house about my ears if I did not keep the article. There is some of first quality; it melts on the tongue, and is as sweet as sugar; and what can I do for *you?* you want to buy clothes, eh?" he said, turning to Hohburg, who was examining some articles of clothing hanging around. "Choose what you want. The bush plays the deuce with one's 'wardrobe,' as the swells say. Famous stuff that you have got in your hand; wears like leather, and is as soft as silk. The prices are marked on tickets."

"How stand matters about here?" Toby asked his host, in a low voice, as Hohburg examined the clothes. "Is everything safe?"

"Safe!—the devil a bit!" replied the other, in a whisper. "The native police have been prowling about the country all the morning. You have seen nothing of them?"

"The native police!" exclaimed the bushranger, with astonishment and dismay. "Are you bored with these dogs in South Australia too?"

"No, we have no notion of keeping such fellows," replied the shop-keeper; "they have come direct from the Murray, where they drove a certain—I wont mention names—into the river, and they are close upon the heels of another. Johnny! Johnny! the repose of your soul has cost me three masses already, and, after all, you are alive and kicking! It is not fair to play such tricks with one's old friends."

"Then I must look sharp and be off," said the bushranger, without entering into the joke, and casting a hasty glance at the door. "The brutes know my tracks as well as if they had them down in black and white. Had not a smart shower, and the timely rising of the river, come to my assistance, I

should not have succeeded in shaking them off, in spite of all my dodging."

"Here is something from your black friends," said the host, pointing to a paper nailed against the door.

"Have they got *me* on it?" asked the bushranger, with an expression of fear, casting a shy look at the bill.

"Not you, but one of your comrades—Jack Loudon, or whatever his name may be. They followed his tracks as far as the settlements. He seemed to have turned to the Burra-Burra mine, but they lost his traces at this spot. The Germans stick on their own bits of land, and have made roads and paths in all directions. They are now searching everywhere in the neighbourhood. Is he such a dangerous fellow?"

"Nonsense!" replied John, contemptuously; "a braggard, talks big and acts the generous, always mixes with the swells, and, in fact, does not wish to have anything to do with *business*."

"Ah! ah! one of that sort, I see," said the shop-keeper, with a quiet laugh. "I know these fellows. But I am astonished they should be so anxious to secure him!"

"It is the old story," growled John. "Just as we feel uncomfortable when we know one of these spies is sneaking about in the neighbourhood, so these gentlemen never feel at their ease as long as an escaped convict is left in the bush. Not that they *fear* Jack Loudon; they might very well leave him in the bush. I don't think he would hurt a sheep; but they are afraid of the *example*. What *he* can do, others believe *they* can do also. Therefore the police *must* catch the fugitives again, or shoot them, or they would soon not have a single fellow left inside the prisons. But I wanted to say something—Oh, just read this bill to me, will you? It is always interesting to know how these gentlemen express themselves about us, although it may not concern oneself."

Hohburg's attention had also been attracted by the bill stuck up at the door, and he cast a hasty glance at the paper. But in those times notices of escaped convicts were too common; and, after reading the first few lines, he turned again to the clothes. The 100*l*. reward did not long attract his attention.

"Not a bad price," said Toby, with a smile, as the bill was explained to him.

"I should think so," replied the other. "One hundred pounds and full pardon to any ticket-of-leave man. Magistrates and others are hereby requested to deliver up to the police, alive or dead, Jack Loudon, *alias* Murphy, *alias*—— and so on; the fellow has a whole string of names; who has made his escape for the second time, or give such information as shall lead to his apprehension. Then follows an exact description of his person as he was seen last. That of course he can alter, for these fellows understand how to disguise themselves. It is also stated, as a caution, or hint, that he is likely to be staying somewhere in South Australia, and will probably endeavour to make his escape from the port of Adelaide, or some other point of the coast."

"Hem—hem—hem!" said Toby, extremely ill at ease at the thought of the black police. Had he suspected that these fellows were in the neighbourhood, he would never have thought of speaking to the German, who, in his simplicity, might very easily betray him. His imprudence had endangered his safety. If his pursuers had any idea that he was still alive, he might rely upon it that they would not leave a single house unsearched; not a thicket in the bush unexplored, until they had discovered his tracks. He knew very well that the store-keeper himself would not betray him, as he was himself a ticket-of-leave man, and his best customers were convicts, whose vengeance in such a case he would have had to dread. This would not have repaid for any compensation the police could offer. The best thing he could do, was, perhaps, to make the German, to a certain extent, his confidant as to his future plans, and deceive him as to the direction he meant to take. By this means he might gain a good start.

He was still standing by the window, irresolute, and brooding over these plans, when he saw a man coming up the street, dressed like a townsman; he wore spectacles, and Toby retreated instinctively from the small window. The less he was seen, the better it would be for him. Still, he was struck by the man's appearance, which seemed familiar to him, and he looked narrowly at him as he drew near.

"Who the devil is that, mate?" he asked the shopkeeper. "I have seen the cut of that gib before; and yet I don't

recollect ever having had anything to do with a fellow wearing spectacles, except little Josey, the lawyer, who cut, and who afterwards had his brains blown out by the long-legged sergeant."

"Oh, that is a Mr. Schreiber, a physician," the shopkeeper replied, on looking out of the window; "he has been spending a few days at Lischke's, the whitesmith. He called here once to buy powder and shot; he wants to stuff birds and send them to the old country."

"Dr. Schreiber!" muttered Toby, again stepping to the window. The stranger had by this time stopped in the middle of the street, but evidently without any intention of entering the house. He took off his spectacles, wiped his eyes, and turned his face towards the shop, while looking down the street. His looks met those of Toby for an instant, he turned away his head, put on his spectacles, and continued his journey.

That glance, however, had been quite sufficient for the convict, accustomed as he was to such disguises, and he recognised in the supposed German, Dr. Schreiber, his former companion, Jack Loudon. Great as his surprise was, he took care not to say a syllable about it to the store-keeper. It was still possible, hunted as he was, that he might again take to the bush with his former companion; and, in that case, the less people knew about their secret the better it would be for them.

At this moment, the shopkeeper's attention was taken up with one German who had chosen a few articles of dress, and began to bargain as to the price. Toby resolved to seize this moment to speak to his old companion. At any rate, as matters stood, he would not again venture into the settlement, if he missed this opportunity.

"Wait for me a minute here, mate," he said to Hohburg, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and turning to the door; "I shall be back in a minute. If that is a doctor, I should like to consult him about an old wound I have, and he may perhaps do something for it." Without waiting for an answer he left the house, and ran hastily after the supposed Dr. Schreiber.

M'Donald heard the steps behind him, but did not turn round until his pursuer was quite close, and stopped him with —"Where are you going so fast, mate?"

Surprised, M'Donald turned to the speaker, and a single

look at the shy but wary Irishman showed him that he was recognised, and that further disguise was useless.

"Hallo—Jack!" continued Toby, laughing, having ascertained that nobody was in sight; whilst a small clump of trees stood between them and the house; "you look devilish smart, and are so well disguised with your blue glasses, that an old friend and companion could scarcely recognise you. Well, how are you getting on, my good fellow? Done the blackeys again, eh? They thought I had been food for the fishes, and left me in peace for some time; but this place is getting too hot again, and I shall have to look out for another retreat. Shall we take the trip together? To be alone in in the bush is a d—d uncomfortable thing. A fellow has to be on the look-out all day, and to watch at night too: it soon settles one. Besides, it is a great deal better *working* in company. Well," he added, sulkily, beginning to feel uncomfortable under M'Donald's firm and steady gaze, "what is there so particular about me that you examine me as if you would look through me with those blue glasses of yours? and you let me hold out my hand, too, until my arm is getting quite stiff. What's in the wind, now?"

M'Donald had not interrupted him by a single syllable, nor had he accepted the proffered hand. He shuddered at the touch of the *murderer*, and he merely gazed at the criminal standing before him, who could not help quailing under his look. At last he took off his spectacles, and said, in a quiet and firm voice,—

"You know well enough, I fancy, why I neither can nor will have anything to do with you."

"Nothing to do with me?" replied the convict, jeeringly. "You have grown very proud all at once, in your black coat. Perhaps you think the black-blue jackets will care about your blue spectacles. Am I any worse because I have no money to buy myself fine clothes?"

"No, certainly not," M'Donald replied, calmly; "but the blood upon your hands is a stain that cannot be washed out. Good advice is lost upon you; however long the rope by which the hangman lets you roam about in the bush, be assured you will not escape. I hoped, on finding you in peaceful occupation in the bush, that you had renounced your wild and criminal career, and were resolved to become another

man. I did not then know you had fled thither only to escape the consequences of a fresh murder. How you evaded your pursuers I do not and will not know; but never speak to me again! I shall not betray you, and I think I am safe from you in that respect; but I will henceforth hold no intercourse with you."

"The deuce!" exclaimed John, or Toby, with a sarcastic smile; "why, you preach as well as the best priest in the whole settlement,—and is that all your friendship for an old mate? Very well; enjoy your prosperity, and let an old bush companion starve until want again drives him to crime. What do I care how soon they catch me now? such a life is worse than that of a dingo in the bush. I have no money; escape I cannot; and if I am to be hanged, I may as well die in company."

"I am not afraid of your threats," said M'Donald, gloomily, "for as long as you can keep out of the grasp of the police, you will do so. If you are really in want, I will assist you once more; but, by Heaven! this is the last time. Here," he continued, placing two pieces of gold into a hand eagerly stretched out; "buy yourself other clothes, and try to escape to the north. Workmen are wanted in the copper mines, and no one will ask you whence you come—time is all you want."

"Do you know that the black police are upon your tracks?" Toby asked his companion, watching the effect of his words, as he shook the money in his hand, before putting it into his pocket.

"I know they are," answered M'Donald, turning away; "that is my affair."

"Thank you," cried Toby, with a rude, hoarse laugh; "then we shall both of us find safety 'privatim,' as the little lawyer always said. Have you—but what is that to me?" he continued, angrily, as M'Donald, without bestowing another look upon him, walked away, leaving him standing in the middle of the road. "I'll be hanged if that is not taking it coolly! Why, he walks along as big as if he were the governor himself! Then, that's how we stand, my good fellow, is it? and, with these two yellow-boys, you fancy you have bought off my 'friendship'? You are quite wrong, my boy—short of the mark by a good deal. If you had not been

so proud, I should have told you that your warrant is nailed up yonder; but, if you will not know it, I don't care either —it is quite immaterial to me."

"What shall I do now? he said to himself, as he walked back to the store. "A hundred pounds would not be so bad, and might be earned easily enough, if I could only show myself to the rascals! The free pardon is only for ticket-of-leave men. My ticket-of-leave I wrote myself, so I shall have to keep to the hundred pounds. Yes; but how am I to manage? There is nothing to be done with the store-keeper; he must keep good friends with them or his life would not be safe. What of the other fellow, Miller? I think I must have another look at him. Now the money-chest is afloat again," he added, with an arrogant smile, striking his pocket, and making the two pieces of gold jingle. "There is nothing better than a good talent for procuring money, and it always drops at my feet, as if it fell from the clouds. That for the future," he added, with a snap of the fingers: "I begin to fancy I am proof against the whole troop. The hemp is not sown yet which shall make a rope for Red John; the bullet is not moulded, and if I manage adroitly, I shall get fifty pounds in cash, and become a gentleman into the bargain, as well as Jack Loudon. So the hangman lets me run about with a long rope only because he pleases to give me a short respite? Well, we'll see, my boy, which of us will be the first victim; and I will take care I am not."

"Hallo, mate!" he exclaimed, on meeting the German, who was just leaving the house with a bundle of clothes under one arm and a loaf of bread under the other. "Off already? That won't do, mate; we must first have another glass together."

"I have not a penny left," said Hohburg, evasively; "your tobacco and brandy are paid for—that was my last money."

"At any rate, I have some," said the bushranger, laughing, and striking his pocket; "I only wanted to test you, mate; and see whether you would leave an old comrade in the lurch without brandy or tobacco, and I am glad to find that you are such a good fellow; here, Jack, let us have a bottle of gin, but of your best, with hot water and sugar. It is a long time since I had a reeking hot tumbler of grog. Have you not such a thing as a quiet little room, where one could stay and have a chat for half an hour without being disturbed? I

have something of importance to talk over with my friend here?"

"Nothing easier," said the shopkeeper, laughing, understanding his guest's anxiety not to be disturbed. "Come along; there is a small out-house with a door into the bush," he added in a whisper to the bushranger. "I shall bring you the stuff in a minute."

"And something to eat—bread and meat, or anything else you may have."

"I will attend to it."

"I thank you heartily, mate," said Hohburg, as the storekeeper left them to get what was wanted. "But I must be off—I have not an instant to lose."

"Nonsense, man," said the bushranger, laughing; "you won't find such good Hollands anywhere in Adelaide; and there—" he added, in a whisper, "can you in half a day gain fifty pounds?"

"Fifty pounds!" Hohburg exclaimed, with astonishment.

"Hush! not so loud," said Toby, with a furtive glance at the door, through which the host had disappeared and might return every minute.

"It is no use letting him know anything about it. He might easily do us out of the money."

"How is it to be gained?" asked Hohburg, jumping at the chance of replacing the money he had wasted, and of realizing his wife's desire in a moment: "not in an unlawful manner, I hope," he added, with caution; and, indeed, a look at the man who had made the offer fully justified such a suspicion.

"Don't be frightened, mate!" the latter replied, with a laugh; "the most tender conscience could feel at ease as to the lawfulness of the act. The police themselves will pay you the money."

"The police!"

"Have you read that bill?" asked John, raising his thumb over his shoulder and pointing to the door.

"Yes; at least I looked at it. It offers a reward for the apprehension of a notorious bushranger."

"Exactly," said John, laughing; "and I know where he may be found."

"You do?" Hohburg said with surprise.

"Hush, man! don't shout so. Hang it, do you want the

whole neighbourhood to know what we are talking about? There is Jack coming with the Hollands, if you want to earn the money, come along."

"But, it is getting dark, and I must return home."

"If you can earn more money there," John replied, with an air of indifference, "you can do so. I was not aware you made such good employment."

"Fifty pounds—"

"Are not to be thrown away, I should say. But, take a glass with me, and you can consider over it, and do as you please."

"Here, mates, here is the stuff," said the host, returning at that moment; "put your things in the corner there; I will look to them."

"Fifty pounds!" muttered Hohburg, in a dream, as he passively suffered the shopkeeper to take his clothes and the loaf of bread, and followed the tempter into the small retired room where the reeking and alluring drink already awaited him.

Meantime, with a heart growing heavier and heavier, the poor woman awaited the return of her husband. The sun sank beneath the horizon, and night closed upon the tranquil bush, and still he came not. The stars sparkled in the sky above, the moon shed her peaceful light on the rustling woods, and still he did not return. Again, and again, did she hasten to the door when the noise of a passing wood or corn waggon broke the stillness; or, when a voice was heard on the street, but it was all in vain. Her anxiously expected husband did not return, and her heart throbbed when she endeavoured to think over what could have detained him.

The child asked for its supper; she was hungry; and her mother quieted her by saying that her father would soon return with the bread—but he came not. The clock struck eight, nine, and—several times she had been on the point of taking her bonnet and shawl and going down the street, in order to ascertain whether anything had befallen the weak and sickly man. At last her anxiety and impatience overcame her; it was very late and a heavy dew was falling; so she took her child, whom she did not like to leave by herself in the solitary house, and walked with hasty steps down the street towards the shop. There she felt that she would be

sure to hear what had become of her husband, and at what time he had left the place.

As she approached the place she saw a light in the shop, a waggon stood before the door, and inside she found a German peasant purchasing a quarter of a pound of tobacco. The store-keeper and his customer were the only persons in the small place. Before the woman could say a word to the store-keeper a pang shot through her heart, a hoarse laugh resounded from the room close behind, and she thought that she distinguished her husband's voice.

"Are you not going to buy some bread, mamma?" the child asked in a low, timid voice.

"Yes, my dear Lizzy," she replied, as she went to the counter, upon which she laid the last shilling she possessed. The shopkeeper gave her the loaf of bread.

"Anything else, missus?" he asked, leaning both his arms upon the counter, and looking at her in a friendly manner.

Again the laugh resounded from the other room, but the question died away upon her lips, her knees trembled, and with a low "No, thank you!" she left the house hastily with her child. Yet she hesitated to go home without having obtained some *certainty*, even should that prove to be most fearful. The peasant having purchased the tobacco, came out; he had lit his pipe, passed her with a "Good evening," and drove slowly down the street.

"Are we going home soon, mamma?" the child inquired. "And do you think father is there now?"

"Directly, my dear child, directly," the mother answered, in a voice stifled with anxiety.

Through the window she, at that moment, caught a glance of her husband. The door opened, and Hohburg—Edward—with an empty bottle in his hand, with rigid features and glassy eyes, tottered to the counter, where the store-keeper stood looking at him, and shaking his head.

"Another bottle, mate!" the drunken man stammered forth, his words interrupted, and almost made unintelligible by a hiccup, "hic! old boy—another bottle of this—hic—this famous stuff—for to-night we'll merry, merry be—hic—and to-morrow we'll be sober," he sang, at the same time striking the counter with his fist. Now, from the door behind him appeared the laughing face of Red John.

"Yes, that's all very well, my good fellow," the shop-

keeper said, quietly taking the bottle; "but I have already advanced you four shillings on the clothes, and this makes seven."

"Hang it, man! Did I not an hour ago pay you seventeen for them?" stammered the drunkard. "And are they not now—hic—worth at least seven?"

"Yes, my good fellow; but I sell clothes myself, and cannot make any profit on them if I take them back at the same price."

"Oh, go to grass," said the German, with an oath; "to-morrow I shall have a—hic—have a pocketful of gold—to-morrow."

"Come now, Jack, give him another bottle," said the other, interfering; "we are engaged so pleasantly together, and you have made enough money out of us to-day."

"Made enough!" growled the shopkeeper; "well then, I'll give you another, but it will be the last. And don't make such a row in that room. It is not absolutely necessary that the whole neighbourhood should know you are keeping your birthday."

"What is the matter with you, mamma?—why do you cry so?" said Lizzy, taking hold of her mother's arm, as she covered her face with her hands; "are you hurt?"

"Yes, my child—yes," sobbed the woman; "but come," she added, with a violent effort to collect herself, "come, we will go home!"

"Will father be there, mamma?"

The woman lifted her child from the ground, pressed it convulsively to her bosom, and kissed its soft cheeks. Then she placed her on her feet again, and walked hastily and in silence towards her own solitary home.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DR. SPIEGEL'S SOIREE.

On leaving Toby in the middle of the road, M'Donald walked slowly, and with apparent confidence, towards his residence. He would not let that man perceive how disagreeable the meeting was to him. But in spite of his self-possession, his

heart beat quickly and anxiously as he thought of the facility with which the bushranger had recognised him, and of the readiness with which he had penetrated his disguise. Could he feel safe after this if he met one of his black pursuers, who were at least as sharp-sighted as the bushranger ?—and was he not consequently every moment exposed to the danger of being recognised and apprehended, or driven again into the bush ?

The two horsemen he had encountered that very afternoon showed that the native police had moved their outposts as far as the place where he was, and his only chance of safety lay in the fact that none of them, not even Walker himself, could have any notion that he was well enough acquainted with the German language to live in this settlement as a German. In that case, should the slightest suspicion fall upon him he must be lost.

He had little fear of being betrayed by John, who had no associate whom he could trust, and hardly dare venture to present himself before the authorities. He had been guilty of crimes too fearful ever to hope to gain a pardon by turning king's evidence against another, and he was certain of being hanged if by any chance he fell into the hands of the police.

In spite of all this, M'Donald felt that he must now more than ever be upon his guard, and endeavour, without exciting suspicion among his acquaintance, to avoid as much as possible every unnecessary encounter with strangers. In gaining time he gained everything ; and if his pursuers once left that part of the country, it would be easy for him, recommended as he was likely to be by Dr. Spiegel, to obtain a passage on board some ship. He would only attempt as a last resource to leave the island in a small boat. This would be a desperate plan of trying to fall in with a ship out at sea, and by this means to make his escape.

As these thoughts passed through his mind he very much regretted that he had promised to spend the evening at Dr. Spiegel's house. However, he could not well get off, as he had engaged to escort Miss Lischke to the party. Moreover, he was almost certain of meeting the German captain, and if he became better acquainted with him he might thus obtain the means of leaving the country on board his ship. No one could give him better information respecting the

movements of the police than Spiegel, and under the circumstances it was absolutely necessary for him to know what they were about, that he might take his measures accordingly.

Nothing is so painful as uncertainty. As soon as we have come to a firm determination, we meet the future, however gloomy it may appear, with calmness and decision. We have made up our minds for the worst, and consequently await destiny fearlessly, and look it boldly in the face.

The walk to Lischke's gave M'Donald time to collect his thoughts, and to decide upon the plans he was to pursue. He received Mrs. Lischke's greeting with a friendly smile. The good woman always felt a certain pride in seeing her daughter share in the parties and amusements of the "respectable people" of the town, although she could very seldom be prevailed upon to accompany her, and was, therefore, not often invited.

Susanna had already completed her toilet when M'Donald arrived, and old Lischke sat smiling on his stool by the window examining his daughter, in whom he took especial delight. Her sudden compliance with his wishes rendered her still dearer in his eyes. As to "parties," he did not approve of them, and he never joined in any of them. It required, he thought, a very peculiar taste to sit a whole evening drinking weak tea and hearing tedious stories; for the doctor, he declared somewhat maliciously, only got up such parties to inflict his own compositions upon his wearied guests. He admitted that music was also permitted, and Susanna, of whose talents he was very proud, without acknowledging it, might be heard to advantage, and this idea somewhat reconciled him to those parties. It is scarcely necessary to add that he had not the least notion that Von Pick was a friend of Dr. Spiegel's, or else no persuasion would have induced him to risk another meeting between his daughter and the "gent," as he usually called him. As for Dr. Schreiber, he was a quiet, sedate man, and a good physician, as he had perceived at first sight, and he could trust his child with him for this evening. On the following day the betrothal with Christian Helling was to take place, and after that anybody who wanted to have his daughter's society must also ask her bridegroom.

It was dusk before they left the house, which was only a

short distance from Dr. Spiegel's, and the road lay between fences and houses. M'Donald and Susanna, talking cosily together, walked down the street at a pretty brisk pace. Susanna listened eagerly to the adventurous tales related by this earnest man, who had seen a great deal of the world; whilst the latter relaxed his mind in these conversations, and diverted his thoughts from all unpleasant associations.

They had not proceeded more than half way to Dr. Spiegel's, having just reached a spot where, at the corner of a fence, a small thicket of gum trees had been left standing, when M'Donald perceived the figure of a man who emerged from the shade of the trees, and, on hearing steps, disappeared again suddenly. The moon was just rising; but the uncertain light which it threw over the street, broken by shadows, did not enable him to make out who the intruder was. Susanna had taken M'Donald's arm, and the latter perceived that she trembled violently at the sudden appearance of the man. She did not, however, speak, and only drew her companion hastily to the other side of the street.

"Be not afraid," said M'Donald, smiling, but at the same time keeping a sharp look-out on the dark bush, and changing sides with the lady, so as to place himself between her and the thicket; "it is, doubtless, some person belonging to that house."

Susanna cast a timid look in the direction, and redoubled her pace, without saying a word in reply. They soon left this spot behind them, and reached a broad road, enclosed by fences and brightly illumined by the moon, and immediately afterwards came to the principal street of the town.

In a few moments the gaily-lighted windows of Dr. Spiegel's house burst upon their sight, and gave them a friendly invitation to enter. The doctor, beaming with pleasure, received his guests and took M'Donald—while his wife ran off with the young lady—into the lower room, where a rather numerous party had already assembled.

In the small colonial towns the number of those whose habits permit of their joining in such recreations is naturally very small; consequently, no one can be overlooked who is fitted to move in such a circle of society. In the colonies the various layers of society are strangely and arbitrarily mixed together, and it is extremely difficult, and sometimes impossible, to make a selection.

Men are all equal, sounds very well and natural—that we are all brothers, must be quite true from a mere human point of view. In social life, however, and even where the first forms of civilization are developed out of barbarism, the different classes of society separate of their own accord, and the educated man associates almost exclusively with those of like condition. A community of goods and a community of mind are both impossible. They can never be realized in life, and only those who are united by kindred habits and endowments can, in the long run, feel at their ease together.

Dr. Spiegel had carefully selected from the inhabitants of Saaldorf those who suited *him*—whether they agreed among *themselves* was to him a matter of perfect indifference. There were, for instance, our two acquaintances, the young doctor Anastasius Fiedel and the apothecary Schelling, each occupying an opposite corner of the room; Captain Helger was leaning at the side of old Mrs. Spiegel, engaged in a friendly chat with her, and at the same time carefully modifying his somewhat thin tea into "stiff grog;" and even Breyfeld, the ornithologist, who had for the nonce donned a black coat, was sitting on the edge of his chair, holding his cup of tea in one hand, and a piece of tea-cake in the other.

In addition to those whose acquaintance the reader has already made, a Mr. Tegel, contributor to the *Adelaide Journal*, and an Englishman, named Smith, and his wife, were present. Smith, a client, and, as the apothecary sometimes rather maliciously asserted, the sole client of Dr. Spiegel, could not have been overlooked; yet he seemed bored, for the conversation was carried on altogether in German. He was sitting pretty stiffly in a corner, with his wife at his side, until, to his great relief, and to Captain Helger's unbounded astonishment, *another* doctor entered the room, with his wife and daughter. He was a German missionary, an able and upright man, the Rev. Dr. Meier. For a number of years he had devoted himself to the ungrateful task of converting the blacks to Christianity and civilization. He spoke English perfectly well, and the Smiths clung to him with the energy of despair.

Susanna's appearance infused new life into the small circle. Her lively, cheerful manners, as well as her musical talents, had long gained all hearts, and Dr. Spiegel, although continually quarrelling with old Lischke, considered her an orna-

ment to his company. She immediately joined Mary Merre, the missionary's daughter, and, after the first greetings, M'Donald retired into a corner of the room, and sat down by Captain Helger.

The first movements of such a party, whether in the colonies or in the old country, are always awkward. The company have not had time to get on a friendly footing, and are generally unacquainted with each other. The name is seldom understood in the hasty introduction, or it is forgotten as soon as it is heard, and handing round the tea disturbs instead of assisting conversation. The talk consists mostly of pauses. Spiegel was too engaged to look much after his guests, and Bertha could not even leave the kitchen. She had, indeed, hired for the day what is called a "help," a girl from the neighbourhood, to assist her; yet, after all, she had everything to do herself. At that moment Mr. Von Pick fortunately arrived.

As soon as he entered the room, Dr. Spiegel, who had been anxiously expecting him, took him by the arm, led him into another apartment, and whispered—

"Pray tell me, Mr. Von Pick, what *is* the matter with Johnson? There is a rumour in town that his coal affair has turned out to be a mere bubble, and that he has run away."

Pick was greatly annoyed at learning that Spiegel already knew the story. He at once determined not to let the matter interfere with his pleasure that evening, and he had, moreover, been for years accustomed to put off impending danger as long as possible, in order to gain time. Acting on this principle, his sole thought was to frame a plausible excuse. What must come later, must; only let it be delayed as long as possible.

"Nonsense, my dear doctor," he answered, with a laugh; "it is merely a stratagem, you see. A lot of persons have been running after him and watching him for the last few days, and he has gone away secretly, in order to evade pursuit. In fact, we have appointed a place of meeting."

"You have taken a hundredweight off my breast," said Spiegel, "but I at once thought this was the case. He has done right to get away secretly, and it will answer our purpose all the better for everybody else to regard the affair as a bubble. Now, Mr. Von Pick," he continued, aloud, taking him back to the company, "you will have to undertake the

musical part. We awaited your arrival with great impatience."

Von Pick was a pretty good pianist, had a very fine voice, and was both glad and willing to undertake the musical arrangements.

This was soon done. The piano was in good order, with only one or two keys out of tune; and Mr. Von Pick persuaded Miss Lischke to oblige the company with one of her little songs, in which she excelled, whilst he played the accompaniment.

The first notes infused a new life into the company. There is something peculiar in music; and even in the old country, where we have constant opportunities of hearing *good* music, its alluring tones penetrate to our heart, and tranquillize the soul, however stormy its emotions. How much more is this the case in the colonies, where good music is seldom heard; where people, in their constant struggle for gain and wealth, are now and then awoke, as it were, out of an unpleasant dream, and brought to themselves, by the sweet, beloved sounds. It is, then, not only the melody, not only the well-known and fondly-remembered tunes which appeal to our hearts, but also the *recollection* of former and happier times which suddenly rise before us. The soft sounds carry us back to our native home with the quickness of thought; and sweet as the feeling is which stirs our heart, it usually is no less sad, giving a serious turn to our thoughts, and, in spite of all our struggles, calling the treacherous tear to our eye.

Music has, however, a different and more practical effect upon a tea-party. The first sounds almost always dispel the charm that hangs over the guests. Those who have been sitting stiff and silent are suddenly made pliable, and their tongues are loosened by its magic influence.

"Are you fond of music?" Mrs. Schelling said to Mrs. Meier.

"Oh! I am very fond of it, indeed."

"And so am I," rejoined the apothecary's wife; "indeed, there was a young man living in our house who could play most beautifully on the flute,—and our little Sidon, the poor child who afterwards died of nervous fever, had a wonderful talent for music."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Meier, who disliked conversing while music was going on; "just listen how beautifully Mr. Von Pick plays the introduction."

"Yes," said Mrs. Schelling, not in the least disconcerted; "I should say that his fingers have no joints. They go up and down the keys helter-skelter, just as if one rattled a stick against a railing, which the boys are so fond of doing. I can scarcely tell you, Mrs. Meier, how much that same practice sometimes annoys me. There are railings just before my window, and the boys are bent upon vexing me."

Previous to this outburst, Mrs. Schelling had not opened her mouth, excepting to say "thank you kindly," on handing her cup, or in taking a piece of cake; but since the music had commenced, she seemed to have recovered her powers of speech, and her tongue ran more glibly than ever. Old Mrs. Spiegel soon joined her vigorously, whilst the apothecary himself commenced a very lively conversation with Breyfeld on some antediluvian remains of a gigantic bird found in New Zealand.

Young Dr. Fiedel, who also considered music as a mere fill-up, could do nothing better than commence a conversation in very broken English with Mr. Smith. He endeavoured to explain to him some of his most important cures, fractures, and operations. As he was not sufficiently versed in the language to explain his views fully, he naturally was forced to have recourse to a great many gesticulations of a most lively character, and as he had in his hand the tea-cup and saucer, Mrs. Spiegel was in great dread of seeing him break the good cup, which he actually did at the end of the second song. Poor Mrs. Spiegel had become quite nervous about it, and did not hear a note of either of the songs. M'Donald and Captain Helger sat together in silence listening to the welcome sounds.

The greater part of the company applauded each song vehemently. Most of them had only a confused notion that it was music, yet felt themselves compelled to exclaim with great satisfaction—"Bravo! excellent! really beautiful!"

Dr. Spiegel had something else in store for his guests besides music. After this, which he considered as a worthy preparation for the higher pleasure of his own readings, he suddenly brought a small table into the middle of the room, placed a chair near it, and put two fresh candles upon it.

Reading! Man is, indeed, the most wicked, cruel creature in the world. Did a tiger, on which these epithets are usually bestowed, ever shut up its victim for years in solitary cells,

and feast upon its pain? Was this wild animal ever known to steal its victim's life, to reduce families to misery, and to heap horror upon horror upon it, in its prison? Man alone can perpetrate such deeds, and he abuses in the most violent and arbitrary manner that reason which God has given for very different and more beneficial aims.

Ought not people to be ashamed to allure their fellow-creatures together, by means of a cup of tea, in order to inflict upon them the most fearful doom; in other words, to *weary* them? What is the name of the power which gives them such a right over us? What prevents us from rising, in our just anger, to renounce their tea and bread-and-butter, and fly from such a painful position?—Propriety, the usages and customs of society, and whatever else may be the names of these monsters, which squeeze us in clothes too tight, and force us to smile when our grim wrath impels us to protest.

Dr. Spiegel was an excellent man, one who would not knowingly have hurt a child, but by his reading propensities he did so unconsciously, and was on that account more dangerous.

Fortunately he had mislaid his manuscript, and his guests gained a little respite.

Von Pick had long sought an opportunity of speaking to Susanna. She had, however, been seized by the ladies, who overwhelmed her with flatteries about her charming voice and "wonderful execution."

Young Dr. Fiedel did not let the opportunity slip of approaching and entering into conversation with Mr. Von Pick, for whom he, strangely enough, entertained a most profound respect. Unfortunately, Von Pick did not listen to what he said, as his attention was taken up with watching for a favourable opportunity to speak to Susanna. However, Dr. Fiedel, although unconscious of it himself, hit on a matter which highly interested him.

The new physician, who, it seemed, had fully made up his mind to settle in these parts, had been for the last few days a perfect nuisance in his eyes. He naturally ascribed his arrival to the malice and intrigue of the apothecary Schelling, his fiercest enemy; and to ascertain whether the supposition was correct, he thought he could apply to no better authority than Mr. Von Pick.

"Pray can you tell me, my dear Baron," he said, turning to the latter, "who this stranger, this Dr. Schreiber, with

his mangled German pronunciation, really is? Is he a German? and where does he come from?"

"Indeed, Dr. Fiedel," replied Von Pick, in an absent manner, "I really know nothing about him myself. I suppose he comes from Germany—perhaps from the borders."

"Well, he seems to push his point very vigorously with Miss Lischke," continued Fiedel, drawing a little nearer Mr. Von Pick.

"Indeed! Do you think so?" the latter hastily replied; "but," he added, more slowly, "as far as I can recollect, they have not exchanged a word the whole of the evening."

"Well, *that* would be no proof," said Dr. Fiedel, with a smile and a knowing wink. "Sometimes people do not think it advisable to know each other in society under these circumstances?"

"You think so?"

"He escorted the young lady here in the dark, and has, moreover, taken up his quarters at the father's in a very offhand style. I call that going on at full speed. Who can have brought him here, I should like to know? I would bet my horse it is that apothecary Schelling! Perhaps he is some relation of his, whom he wishes to settle here at the expense of the population."

Von Pick at once perceived the drift of the young doctor's suppositions and observations. Nevertheless, the young man's opinion, so boldly pronounced, startled him, and he looked rather suspiciously at M'Donald. The latter was not taking the slightest notice of Susanna, who stood not far from him, but seemed to be engaged in a very lively conversation with Captain Helger.

"I really do not know where he comes from," he at last said, in reply to the remarks of the young and jealous doctor. "I should scarcely take him for a German if he did not speak the language perfectly, and only with a very little foreign accent. He came, I believe, overland from Melbourne. Whether Schelling brought him here or not I really do not know."

"And then the blue spectacles he wears," observed Dr. Fiedel; "how can a patient have any confidence in a physician who wears blue spectacles?"

Von Pick did not reply; for at that moment he caught

Susanna's glance, which he obeyed so suddenly that the young doctor looked after him quite aghast.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Spiegel, triumphantly. He had at last, to Breyfeld's extreme horror, found the manuscript so anxiously sought after, upon Breyfeld's chair. The poor man had been sitting very uncomfortably all the evening, but was far too bashful to say anything about it, or to examine into what rendered him so uneasy, until Spiegel, who, with a light in his hand, had been poking his nose into every nook and corner, at last came to his chair and discovered the long-lost treasure. The candles on the small table were immediately lighted, a glass of water was set before him, and Dr. Spiegel, opening the first page of the manuscript, which was of rather formidable thickness, began, not to read, but to enter into an explanation of what had induced him to write a novel, what aim he therein proposed to himself, and what progress he had made in the execution of the scheme.

We have no intention of inflicting upon the reader even a small portion of the manuscript. Suffice it to say, that the first part occupied about three quarters of an hour, during which not a syllable was heard in the room, not a spoon stirred, not a chair moved, and poor bashful Breyfeld was in despair at not being able to smother, just at the most interesting moment, a sneeze, followed by a violent fit of coughing. In consequence of the efforts he made to restrain himself, he caught the hiccup, and was at last obliged, as quietly and quickly as possible, to leave the room.

Schelling began to suspect that this was a stratagem to cover his retreat. Breyfeld was, however, innocent of any such deceit, and he would, indeed, rather have seen his rarest birdskin eaten by the moths than have disturbed all the company.

To the honour of Spiegel be it said, he bore this interruption in an exemplary manner. At the first violent sneeze, he certainly did look round; but of the cough, and Breyfeld's sudden exit, he did not take the least notice.

Breyfeld did not return into the room, but remained sitting on the stairs, waiting for the first pause. He would not on any account have disturbed the company a second time.

Spiegel made a pause, less for the purpose of giving his

hearers a moment's rest, than of expounding to them his plan, in which he did not yet see his way very well, and to hear their opinion. He addressed himself particularly to Tegel, of whose severe criticism he seemed somewhat to stand in awe, although the latter had not uttered a word. This gave Von Pick the long-looked-for opportunity of speaking to Susanna for awhile undisturbed.

The two young people retired into the recess of a window, where they were concealed by Mr. Smith and Dr. Meier, who were engaged in an earnest conversation about the state of the blacks.

"My dear Susan," whispered Von Pick, "your letter of yesterday made me extremely happy; you cannot believe ——"

"I regretted a thousand times having written it," said Susanna, with a sigh, "and shall now have to suffer for it."

"In what way?"

"Of course father read the letter," said Susanna, "and was extremely pleased with it, as he did not understand its hidden meaning. In consequence of this said epistle, he has determined that our betrothal shall take place to-morrow evening."

"The deuce!" muttered Von Pick, with embarrassment.

"Christian himself," continued Susanna, "went to see father in the field, just before I left the house this evening. Father says he seemed unusually agitated, and very happy, and sent his thanks for the letter."

"He has been drinking, and plucked up Dutch courage," said Von Pick, with vexation.

"Father himself has been in a very good humour all day, and mother, to whom I durst not speak of our plot, weeps, and is unhappy. As for myself, I can see no chance of escape," added the girl, with a deep sigh; "I have gone too far, and even this evening contributes to hasten my destiny."

"This evening?"

"I begged father to delay the matter a little, but he thought that, as things now stand, it was high time that I had some one to protect me. He declared that he did not feel pleased at my going into company without my bridegroom, and that he would put a stop to it. I vainly endeavoured to make him understand that I did not wish to be married yet—that what I had done was only with a view of not grieving Christian, and of gaining time. You should

have seen how he received the avowal; he became very angry, and I remained silent for fear of exciting him still more."

"And to-morrow?"

"The betrothal is to take place at one?

"That cannot be," exclaimed Von Pick, driven to despair by the failure of his last hope, although he had prudence enough to speak so as not to let Dr. Meier, who was standing near at hand, hear what he said. "If your father will drive us to extremities, he alone is to blame for the consequences."

"What *can* we do?"

"I will tell you presently," he replied, hastily. "Dr. Spiegel is beginning to read again, and this abominable Dr. Fiedel is watching me. I must speak to you again alone, just before we sit down to supper. Will you promise to do what I request?"

"I *can not* marry this Christian," replied the girl, with an expression of despair.

"Nor shall you. Only do as I tell you, and all will go right."

Dr. Spiegel had now finished his prefatory explanations, and Susanna and Von Pick were disturbed in their conversation by a fresh supply of tea.

The reading commenced again—the hearers resumed their places, and for an hour the infliction was borne with resignation by all present. Naturally enough, resistance under such circumstances could only be passive; consequently, the Smiths, who did not understand a syllable of what was being read, after the first quarter of an hour fell into a pleasant doze. Mrs. Meier followed their example. Dr. Fiedel, interrupted in a most interesting description of a case of inflammation of the lungs which he was inflicting upon the patient Breyfeld—who had been brought in again by Mrs. Spiegel—with the greatest difficulty kept himself awake, and for some time opened his eyes considerably wider than was absolutely necessary.

Tegel alone, fully impressed with the importance of his office as a critic, followed with the most strict attention the development of the plot, that he might afterwards be enabled to ve a full and decided opinion upon the work.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

THE only pleasant interruption to this infliction was the clatter of plates, forks, and spoons in an adjoining room, in which Mrs. Spiegel was occupied making preparations for supper. This apartment was separated from the one occupied by the company only by a thin partition. A crash in the kitchen, caused by the "help," who had thrown down a plate and dish, induced old Mrs. Spiegel to rush out, and the bustle she made in doing this roused the sleepers to a dreamy consciousness of their position. Save this interruption, nothing was heard but the eager voice of the reader.

In vain did Captain Helger several times stretch out his neck in order to ascertain, by the size of the *decreasing* mass of manuscript, the probable duration of the "enjoyment." Dr. Spiegel, with malice prepense, put every page as he finished it under the lump, and thereby prevented his guests from satisfying their curiosity.

Everything in the world must come to an end at last. The manuscript was not, however, exhausted, but supper was ready, and another interruption became unavoidable. Dr. Spiegel, it is true, obstinately endeavoured to maintain his seat, under the pretext that he must at least finish the second volume; but his wife whispered into his ear, and entreated him so earnestly to desist, that at last he closed the manuscript, although he submitted with an air of vexation.

"God be thanked!" muttered Schelling, almost audibly. Mr. Smith said nothing at all, but heaved a deep sigh, as if a weight had been removed from his bosom.

Chairs were carried into the other room, and Von Pick sought to take advantage of this moment of general confusion and relief to approach Susanna. This time, however, Dr. Fiedel was before him. With great assurance, he went up to Miss Lischke, and entered into conversation with her. The opportunity he thought was a good one, as the young lady seemed somewhat excited; no doubt the long lecture had been too much for her; and for weak and tender nerves such a trial, he knew from experience, was very bad.

Susanna was in dreadful perplexity. She saw that her lover was impatiently and anxiously waiting for the oppor-

tunity to communicate with her; and she answered her present companion in monosyllables, hoping by that means to put an end to the unwelcome conversation. However, Dr. Fiedel was not to be easily shaken off. A "most interesting case" of a young German lady, which he had lately treated, gave him an opportunity of speaking of his cures in general, and of this one in particular.

The gentlemen were now asked to show the ladies down to supper. Dr. Fiedel offered his arm to Miss Lischke; Mr. Von Pick, in anger and vexation of spirit, had just time to offer his to Mrs. Meier, with the view of securing, if possible, a place by the side of Susanna. But in this also he failed. He had scarcely entered the room when Dr. Spiegel asked him, in the most friendly manner, to come to the other side of the table with his lady. Arrangements between the lovers were, therefore, put off until after supper.

Captain Helger, who had taken a great liking to his new acquaintance, Dr. Schreiber, chose a place at his side, and Breyfeld also tried to get near him. Dr. Schreiber showed great interest in the Australian fauna, particularly the birds, and on that account stood high in Breyfeld's estimation, and was moreover the only person to whom he could talk. Dr. Spiegel, to carry out as much as possible the rule of the "checkered line," placed Breyfeld between his mother and Mrs. Smith, and he thereby gained the advantage of being incessantly called upon to pass the plates and dishes, pointed out to him by the attentive old lady, up or down the table.

"You inquired lately with much interest after a gentleman named Hohburg, captain," said M'Donald, when the meal had commenced and the conversation was resumed; "might I ask why you take such interest in this family?"

"Certainly," replied the captain, attacking a large piece of roast veal, "it is no secret whatever. I know Hohburg very well; we were born in the same town, and were schoolfellows. I was most anxious to know how his wife was getting on. Her friends in Germany are very intimate with my family, and feel anxious about her, as she has not written to them for a very long time. When they knew that I was bound for Australia, they made me promise to fathom the matter, and to bring them letters if possible. It appears, however, I shall not be able to find out what has become of them; no one can give me any information, and I have even been to

Tanunda and Mount Barker in vain. Nobody in Adelaide knows anything about them. The most probable conjecture is that Hohburg moved up towards Sydney, and settled somewhere about there. I wrote on the subject a few days ago, and hope I shall receive an answer before I leave Adelaide. In case the letter should not arrive before I sail, I have asked Dr. Spiegel, to whom it will be addressed, to forward it to Germany."

"I suppose Mrs. Hohburg's family are in good circumstances?" said M'Donald.

"I should think so," replied the captain; "her brothers are wealthy merchants, ship-owners, and manufacturers; the parents are dead. They were opposed to her marriage with Hohburg, who was somewhat thoughtless; but when young people like each other, they care very little about their relatives, and have no rest until they are spliced."

"I think I can assist you in your researches," said M'Donald.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the captain, laying down his knife and fork with surprise.

"But you must make up your mind to find her whom you thought in affluence, in the greatest misery."

"Then Mrs. Hohburg——"

"Pray do not talk so loud. The husband has fallen into the lowest state of degradation, and the wife goes out to work in order to support herself and child."

"Are you quite certain of that?"

"I am afraid it is too true; but if she is to be assisted, it must be done in a very delicate manner. I have spoken to her."

"You know the Hohburgs?" the captain asked, with astonishment.

"I met with them here accidentally," replied M'Donald, turning off the question, "and think I may say that I am certain they are the same persons whom you are seeking. I have not seen the man."

"But is he here?"

"His wife told me so."

"And where do they live?"

"On the way to Adelaide. You must pass by Lischke's; their dwelling is not far from his house, and any one will be able to direct you. You must only inquire for *Mrs.*

Hohburg. As far as I know, her husband has only lately returned."

"My dear doctor," said the captain, "you cannot conceive what a favour you have done me. I am extremely obliged to you, and," he added, in a lower voice, "am glad now that I came to this private lecture. It certainly is a peculiar kind of amusement, and what people on shore call 'whiling away the time.' I should have liked a game of whist much better."

The conversation at the other end of the table had, in the meantime, become more lively, as Mr. Tegel, the contributor to the *Adelaide Journal*, who had not spoken two words the whole of the evening, but indulged in deep potations of tea, had begun to criticise Dr. Spiegel's composition, and passed some censures on one of the characters. Dr. Spiegel of course fired up, and defended his character with considerable animation.

The guests drank rather freely of the Australian wine, which is fiery, and high words began to circulate. Mr. Von Pick took part in the discussion, and advocated the cause of Dr. Spiegel. Schelling seemed to be only waiting until Dr. Fiedel should have pronounced himself to plant his flag on the opposite side. Even M'Donald and the captain were drawn into the discussion, while, now and then, in the heat of the argument, Dr. Spiegel would turn to the astonished Mr. Smith, and endeavour to explain to him, in a few incoherent sentences in almost as incomprehensible English, the matter in dispute.

Breyfeld was the only one who escaped unscathed. With a bottle of wine at his side, to which he appealed frequently, but very moderately, he sat at the table in the most settled peace and tranquillity, listening to the various arguments, with all of which he seemed fully to agree, as he gave an approving nod, sometimes to one, sometimes to another.

Dr. Fiedel, on the contrary, was quite out of his element. He had vainly endeavoured to enter into conversation with his beautiful neighbour upon diseases incident to children. Susanna had made up her mind not again to be bored, and she rejected in the most decided manner every communication on the subject, however instructive it might appear. At last, every other topic of communication failing him, he took refuge in the most unfortunate topic he could possibly have

chosen. With considerable naïveté, he asked his pretty neighbour whether she did not think that, as a young physician, he would inspire more confidence, particularly in the female part of the population, if he were to take a partner? "A household," he observed at the same time, "is always best and most respectably presided over by a wife."

Susanna looked at him much surprised and rather suspiciously. Did he wish to make merry at her expense? His countenance only expressed a little embarrassment, and showed her she was mistaken.

"Really," she replied, with a smile, "it strikes me that you are so very young that you scarcely can want a wife yet, and a housekeeper could easily take care of your house."

"Capital!" exclaimed Schelling, who was sitting opposite, as he rubbed his hands with delight. He did not look at Fiedel, and when the latter darted a furious glance at him he merely appeared to have been amused at some expression of Dr. Spiegel's. Fiedel was so much put out of countenance that he did not again allude to this topic. In great wrath with the hated vis-à-vis—the "everlasting apothecary," as he called him—he filled his glass to the brim, and was just emptying it at one draught, when he saw over it that the apothecary was drinking to Miss Lischke with a most engaging smile.

At this moment the "help" came in, and beckoned to Mrs. Spiegel. The old lady rose hastily in a great fright, supposing from the frightened look of the girl that some misfortune had happened in the kitchen.

"Don't be afraid, ma'am," said the girl, "it is only——"

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake, what has happened? Are the children——"

"Dear me, how stupid you are, to be sure," said the girl; "it is only a gentleman outside asking for the doctor."

"How you have frightened me, 'Lisbeth!"

"Why, I told you at first not to be frightened," the girl replied in her defence.

"What is the gentleman's name?"

"I don't know; he seems to be some sort of a *h*officer."

"My dear Mrs. Spiegel," was at this moment heard in English, "you must excuse me if I disturb you, or rather Mr. Spiegel, for a single instant. I was just riding by, and saw a light in your house."

"Is it you, Lieutenant Walker?" answered Mrs. Spiegel, recognising the person by the aid of a light just brought by the servant. "Pray come in."

"Thank you; I am in a great hurry, and I only wished to speak a few words with Mr. Spiegel."

"But my husband will not let you go away again. We have a few friends with us."

"And I shall be disturbing all the company."

"Not in the least—pray walk in!"

Lieutenant Walker could not refuse such a kind invitation, so he followed the lady into the room, where the guests were assembled round the table engaged in earnest discussion. Mrs. Spiegel only made a sign to her husband, and went out again to prepare some punch for her guests.

As several of them had risen from their seats, and the conversation was waxing louder, Breyfeld had managed to make his way up to M'Donald. Taking a seat near the latter, he asked him whether he felt inclined to go upon an excursion with him to the mouth of the Murray, near Victoria lake, where they would be sure to find a great number of interesting birds, and plenty of kangaroos.

"Lieutenant Walker!" exclaimed Dr. Spiegel, in English, on recognising the stranger as he entered the room. "This is indeed an unexpected, but so much more welcome, pleasure."

"I should be very sorry to disturb the company."

"No apologies, I beg. Gentlemen, I have the pleasure of introducing Lieutenant Walker to you, the commanding officer in these parts of the mounted black police—the terror of bushrangers and malefactors of all kinds. My wife and you are already well acquainted, lieutenant; then I have the pleasure of introducing to you Miss Susanna Lischke; Dr. Fiedel, our celebrated Æsculapius; Captain Helger, of the *Albertine;* Dr. Schreiber, another Æsculapius; Mr. Breyfeld, the celebrated Australian ornithologist; Mr. Schelling, the apothecary; Mrs. Smith; Mrs. Meier; the Baron Von Pick; the Rev. Dr. Meier; Mr. Tegel, one of the first contributors to the *Adelaide Journal;* Miss Meier; and Mr. Smith, of Saaldorf. Now you know the whole company," he added, pushing his chair back, and placing another near it. "Pray sit down, my dear lieutenant,—I hope I shall soon be able to say captain,—I am heartily glad to see you. First of all

things, drink a glass of wine just to wash the dust out of your mouth."

Walker turned to every one introduced to him, but the whole affair passed off so quickly, and the lights dazzled him so much, after the sudden change from the dark street, that the different persons were confused in an undistinguishable mass; he scarcely even heard their names.

It was a fortunate thing for M'Donald that he had just commenced a conversation with Breyfeld, to which he could return after a formal bow to his most dangerous enemy. He saw at once that Walker did not recognise him in his fashionable dress, and the blue spectacles, with the cropped hair and beard; and he would, of course, scarcely expect to meet him here. The rest he left to the confusion of the assembly and the bustling of the host. Nevertheless the blood burned in his cheeks at hearing that name again pronounced; and it was only from the circumstance that every one turned towards the new visitor that it passed unnoticed. The next moment he had recovered his usual calmness and self-possession.

Some of the guests had risen to join the group which formed round the new visitor. It was well known that the lieutenant had come from New South Wales with part of his men in pursuit of some noted and dangerous bushrangers, who had escaped to the Adelaide district, and every one accordingly hoped to hear something interesting.

Von Pick did not let this opportunity slip of approaching Susan. She had also risen, and went into the next room, the door of which stood open. She was looking at a book of engravings which was open upon the piano. Von Pick went up to her, and seeing that no one was watching him, he whispered quickly and earnestly,—

"Susanna, I have carefully considered everything. There is only one method by which we can force your father to give his consent. Will you lend your aid; or will you, the day after to-morrow, be lost to me, as the recognized bride, and in a few days, perhaps the wife,—the *servant* of Christian Helling?"

"I *cannot* marry him—I have told you so already," said Susanna, despondingly; "hit upon what scheme you please, only save me from this horrible doom."

"Then, my dear Susanna, rely upon me. The only chance you have is to run away."

"Run away?—forsake my parents?" exclaimed Susanna, trembling.

"Only for a few days," the tempter replied, hastily. "We shall easily find a clergyman to marry us in Tanunda. Even if the first should refuse, there are plenty of sects there; on our return, as man and wife, your father will no doubt be angry, but that will last only for a few days, as your mother will stand by us. Your father is not so hard-hearted after all; he cannot abandon his only child because she followed the dictates of her heart. Is it not written: 'Thou shalt leave thy father and mother, and follow thy husband?'"

Susanna did not reply. Her hand rested upon the book; her eyes were fixed unconsciously on the picture,—but she said not a word.

"To-morrow I will conduct you to a place of safety," Von Pick whispered to her in an earnest and tender voice. "Fear shall trouble my sweet bride no more: the bugbear of an awkward, stupid clodhopper, who has the impudence to stretch out his hand after the most beautiful flower of our country, will be forgotten."

"Must it be as soon as to-morrow?" said Susanna, in a low voice.

"We cannot wait until the betrothal has taken place," urged Von Pick. "To-morrow evening at eight o'clock, it will be quite dark; the moon only rises at half-past ten or eleven. At that hour a carriage will be waiting this side of your house, near your father's paddock, by the garden-gate leading to the road. I will be there to give the signal. It shall be Coo-hee, as the blacks call it. This sound will be least noticed, as it is heard everywhere about here; and, before any one can miss you, a couple of fast horses will bear us to love and freedom."

"Oh!—good God!" exclaimed Susanna, sorrowfully.

"At Tanunda," continued Von Pick, "we shall get married; and we can return early on the following morning. Consider, my darling, that a few days of sorrow will render all our future life secure—will unite us for ever."

"If I might only lay the scheme before my mother——?"

"Then we should be lost," Von Pick said hastily, and with evident trepidation. "She is too much afraid of your father to dare to frustrate his plan in so decided a manner. No; she will assist us with her entreaties when we return, but she will never be of any use in the execution of our design."

"How shall I be able to get away?"

"You can just put your cloak and a bonnet somewhere near the garden-gate beforehand. If you can take anything with you," he added, cautiously, "which might help us on our journey, so much the better. One never knows what may happen on the road."

"I am dying with anxiety at the very thought of the affair," whispered Susanna.

"Will you take a glass of punch, Mr. Von Pick?" said Mrs. Spiegel, at this moment coming up to the couple with a plate; "but come to the table, the lieutenant is just giving an account of his late expedition. Come, my dear Susanna, a little drop of this will do you no harm; that in the blue glass is ladies' punch, and very weak and sweet."

"It is getting late, and I should like to go home," replied Susanna, taking a sip out of the glass in order to hide her confusion.

"If Miss Lischke will allow me," said Von Pick, "I shall be very glad to escort her home."

"You are very kind," Susanna replied, with hesitation, "but I came with Dr. Schreiber."

"Oh—you must not go away yet!" said Mrs. Spiegel, kindly. "You must sing us one more of your pretty songs; I cannot tell you how much I like to hear them, and it is not often we have this pleasure."

"Mr. Von Pick—pray come in!" Dr. Spiegel exclaimed at this moment. "Lieutenant Walker is going to relate his late adventure with the bushrangers. My dear Schreiber—pray come nearer, you must not lose any of this."

"My dear doctor," replied the Lieutenant, with a smile, "I give you my word I have no time to tell a long story, how-muchsoever I might wish to contribute to the amusement of the company. Six of my men are waiting for me at the door, and I must give them their orders. I only came in to ask you a few questions."

"I shall be happy to answer them," replied Dr. Spiegel, taking him by the arm, and going with him into the next room. "When I have satisfied your curiosity you must grant us one favour. Now, what can I do for you?—but first, take a glass of punch. Here, Bertha, bring one of your glasses."

"I thank you, madam."

"What can I do for you now?"

"I have a favour to ask of you," replied the Lieutenant, "or rather, I want your advice. One of my black fellows, an extremely sharp and cunning fellow, obstinately maintains that he has discovered, among the numerous tracks in our streets, that of one of the most desperate bushrangers, whom we had cause to think was drowned in the Murray when wounded by one of our men. I am sorry to say that he only found his track this evening, when it was too late to follow it up; but to-morrow, at break of day, he is to pursue his investigation, and see whether he was mistaken or not, and I should like to have some help at hand."

"I suppose it is Jack Loudon you are looking for?" said Dr. Spiegel.

"The one whose tracks he maintains he has found, is the so-called 'Red John,' a wretch who has committed innumerable murders, and who would not shrink from the most horrible crime to serve his purpose."

"A pretty neighbour, to be sure!" exclaimed Dr Spiegel, whose surprise was not of the most pleasing nature; "and Jack Loudon is here into the bargain, too!"

"Have you seen anything of him?" exclaimed the Lieutenant, eagerly.

"I? no!" replied Dr. Spiegel; "but from your late information I thought he had come this way."

"We lost his track here," replied Walker.

"And have you discovered nothing since?"

"Nothing. It seems as if he had suddenly vanished from the earth. Most probably he has taken a small boat and made the mad and desperate attempt of getting on board of some vessel out at sea, and of escaping us in that manner. I should not be astonished if he had done so. However, every precaution has been taken against such an emergency. Government have just sent me two white constables, who are in my way more than they assist me. Nevertheless, I could not refuse to receive them, and quartered them, one at the Saaldorf-hotel, the other in the German House, to watch all new comers. There is no police station in Saaldorf yet, although I hear there is some idea amongst the authorities of establishing one. I want you to support my cause as much as you can. You are well known amongst the Germans here, and can more easily than any one else obtain information from any quarter where a suspicious character might show himself. Will you do me this service?"

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear lieutenant," replied Spiegel, very warmly. "I am entirely at your disposal, and it would give me the greatest satisfaction to be of any use to the state, and above all to you."

"Well, it is settled then!" said Walker. "There are no strangers here at present that you know of?"

"None that I know of—excepting those that have arrived at the two hotels. There is Dr. Schreiber from Melbourne, whom I had the pleasure of introducing to you, and who intends establishing himself here as a physician."

"A countryman of yours?"

"Yes, a German; he lives at old Lischke's."

"The Germans, my dear doctor, do not at present interest me particularly. You must not take this amiss," he added, laughing.

"You have other men in your eye," replied the doctor, laughing. "But, now, will you not sacrifice half an hour or so? You cannot think what a favour you will be rendering us. Besides, you excited our curiosity by a few hints,—your late adventure with the bushranger——"

"Does not at all redound to my credit," said Walker, laughing, and taking his arm in order to return into the other room, "for I have failed in my endeavours to secure him."

"How was that?—Oh, Miss Lischke, you are not making preparations for going so soon? Indeed you must not leave us yet!"

"I must go home, doctor," said Susanna, putting on her shawl.

"Susanna positively refuses to stay," said Mrs. Spiegel. "I have tried everything to persuade her."

"And are you going too, doctor,—oh yes, I forgot; you are Miss Lischke's companion. Can you not come back for a few minutes? I know it is rather a long walk—"

"Indeed I cannot, my dear sir," replied M'Donald, in German; "besides, it is getting late."

Walker turned round at the sound of the voice; but M'Donald bowed to the company, shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Spiegel and Captain Helger, and left the room with the young lady followed by Mrs. Spiegel and her mother.

"Who is that gentleman?" asked Walker, as the door closed behind them.

"It is Dr. Schreiber, whom I mentioned to you before;

a *very* able physician, whom we have persuaded to establish himself here. Do you know him?"

"No; his face seemed familiar to me, but I must be mistaken. Where did you say he lives?"

"At Mr. Lischke's. The young lady is old Lischke's daughter. A splendid voice. A great pity she left us so early."

M'Donald heaved a deep sigh on leaving the room. The danger was as imminent as ever, and still he could see no means of escape. If he remained where he was, he must be hourly exposed to the chance of detection. If he fled, that would at once awaken suspicion, and where would he seek refuge? However, he felt again at liberty, at least for the present; and, but too well accustomed to danger, his bold spirit took courage to brave the impending storm.

Whilst these thoughts were passing quickly through his brain, the ladies had at last finished their leave-taking. The servant girl lighted them to the porch, but, on opening the door, started back with a loud cry; before it stood two blacks looking in with their large, white rolling eyes.

M'Donald stood close to Mahong, the most cunning of the troop—face to face—but the light was behind him, and fell full upon his enemies, who, seeing a lady and a gentleman before them, stepped back hastily and courteously.

"What, in heaven's name, are these?" exclaimed Susanna.

"Native police," replied M'Donald, with a smile, drawing her arm through his own. "You need not be afraid—we are perfectly safe."

The next instant they were in the dark street. The blacks looked after them, but remained at the door, waiting for their chief, and M'Donald, with Susanna, walked slowly down the still dark street towards her father's dwelling.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TREACHERY.

The following morning ushered in an unusual stirring day for the quiet and remote little town of Saaldorf. The black

police had been seen here, there, and everywhere; their dark forms were continually galloping through the streets on their foaming horses, and rumours of bushrangers circulated rapidly through the place. Before noon the most absurd and extravagant stories were whispered from ear to ear. Large bands of bushrangers were said to be conccaled in the forest ready to attack the place, the military were already on the march, and the alarm was to be given everywhere in order to call the citizens to arms. The blacks, it was said, moreover, had united with the bushrangers, and this statement was apparently confirmed by their absence from the town.

Dr. Behr alone remained in Saaldorf, and sauntered as unconcernedly as ever through the streets, bareheaded, and clothed in his blue shirt. What did he care about the black police!

Lieutenant Walker had taken up his head-quarters at the Saaldorf Hotel. All the morning messengers kept coming and going, and this unusual agitation attracted a swarm of the Saaldorf youth, who had assembled on the opposite side of the street, watching the proceedings with the greatest delight and loud acclamations.

"They have caught one—they have caught one!" suddenly resounded through the town. People rushed to their doors and windows, and the street boys in particular, who took the most lively interest in the affair, soon surrounded a member of the black police who was bringing down the street a man in rags, with a large, neglected beard, and pale anxious features.

"Jack Loudon—they have caught Jack Loudon!" shouted the youth. "Hurrah! he will be hung!" and the crowd near the wild couple got timidly out of their way, and standing still, followed them with their eyes.

The two men coming up the street in this manner were old acquaintances of ours: Mahong, of the black police, riding at a slow pace on a horse that seemed tired out. At his side—with his damp hair matted round his temples, a face from which every drop of blood had disappeared, unsteady steps, and holding the stirrup-strap in order to support himself, walked with shy and downcast looks—Hohburg. Once or twice he seemed as if about to stop and flee from the noise and tumult which still increased around him, but the horse stepped quietly on, and he seemed to feel that he wanted the prop, and that he *could* not relinquish his hold.

At last they reached the Saaldorf Hotel, towards which the youth of the place immediately made a rush, running back shyly whenever one of the blacks came out to clear the street.

Hohburg seemed to hesitate whether he should enter the house, but the exclamations muttered around him, the curious looks of the crowd directed towards him, made him at last seek it as a place of refuge.

Mahong, who had committed the man to the care of two of his comrades, went to his officer to inform him, that outside the town, near a small bush tavern, he had met with a very suspicious looking fellow, who earnestly wanted to speak to him, stating further that he had something of great importance to communicate.

"Bring him in, Mahong," said the officer. "When these fellows fall out, or see any advantage in it, they will betray their own brothers. I think we shall hear some news of Red John, unless you were mistaken about the tracks."

The black did not reply, but returned in a few minutes with Hohburg, who, with his hat in his hand, remained standing at the door, casting a shy look at the officer.

"Hallo! who have we got here? It seems to me I know that face. Where did we see each other last, my good fellow!"

"On the Murray," replied Hohburg, in a low voice. "I was just leaving Mr. Powell's station on your arrival."

"Ah, yes! I recollect now. A certain Toby obtained your situation?"

"Yes."

"You were to tell me something about that man," said Walker, with an inquiring glance.

Hohburg looked at the officer with surprise. Toby had made him promise very solemnly, even upon oath, that he would not mention that he had seen him, affirming, as an excuse for this caution, that "he did not stand on a very good footing with the police." He was only to give information about Jack Loudon, receive the reward, and in case Toby happened to have decamped, to deposit the half with the shopkeeper, at whose house they met.

"No," he said, after a short pause, "I know nothing of Toby; but I understood that you were looking out for somebody else?"

"Jack Loudon?" Walker exclaimed, with surprise.

"Anybody who names the place of his abode, will receive one hundred pounds," continued Hohburg, cautiously anxious to make sure of the reward.

"Yes, certainly," replied Walker, looking at the wretched figure standing before him. "*You* know where he is?"

"I do."

Walker rose and walked several times up and down the room with hasty strides. At last he halted before the man, gazed at him narrowly, and said—

"And who are *you*, if I may ask that question? Just look at yourself in that mirror! I do not believe the bush hides a more wretched, degraded looking fellow, be he bushranger or what he may, than yourself. I should like to know to whom I am indebted for the valuable information?"

"I was hut-keeper at Mr. Powell's," replied Hohburg, with downcast eyes. "I was foolish enough to be tempted to drink on my way home, and spent all my money, and—now require more, to support my wife and child."

"You are married?" exclaimed Walker, with astonishment.

"Yes."

"You live in this neighbourhood?"

"My hut is half-an-hour's walk from this, on the road-side."

"What is your name?"

"Hohburg."

"You were known by another name formerly, if I mistake not?"

"In the bush I called myself Miller."

"Exactly," said the officer, returning to the table where he had been sitting, and leaning with his head on his hand for a few moments. A struggle was evidently going on in his bosom. At last he said in a low, almost trembling voice, but firmly, "Speak, then—*where* is this Jack Loudon?"

"Here!"

"In Saaldorf?"

"Yes; and lives at the house of a man called Lischke."

"Lischke?" exclaimed the officer.

"Under the name of Dr. Schreiber," Hohburg slowly continued.

"The devil!" cried Walker, throwing the pen on the table, and starting from his seat,—"I thought I knew that face. But Dr. Schreiber is a German."

"The stranger who was at Mr. Powell's speaks German almost as well as myself."

"And is this Dr. Schreiber still in that house?"

"I saw him yesterday afternoon; he wears blue spectacles, and his hair is shorter than it was when he visited the station."

"Well, leave the rest to me," said the officer, suppressing a sigh. "If what you have communicated to me be confirmed, you must call here to-morrow morning, and receive an order for—the money."

Hohburg, with his hat in his hand, stood for some moments before the officer, who regarded him with an expression of contempt. Hohburg appeared anxious to say something, but, although his lips moved, no sound escaped. At last he turned away, and slowly left the room. On arriving down stairs, in passing the bar, he cast a wistful glance at the sparkling glasses and bottles, and put his hand into the pockets of the tattered jacket. They were, however, empty, and, with his teeth firmly set together, he turned away to leave the house.

In the street he found all the youth of the place assembled, and they immediately began pointing at him with their fingers, whispering and exclaiming, "That's he—there comes the bushranger—look out!" He hesitated, as if unwilling to go out, and one of the blacks beckoned to him, and led him through the yard to another gate, by which he could get into the street unobserved. Hohburg followed him passively, went out by the door pointed out to him, and tottered down the street towards his own home.

The black police were soon on the alert. The sergeant was sent for by his officer, and a long conference took place between them in this room. Mahong was then summoned, and, a few minutes afterwards, the troop drew up before the house. Hasty orders were given, and they galloped off in different directions. The sergeant followed more slowly in one direction, and the lieutenant, accompanied by Mahong, in another. More and more people had gradually gathered before the hotel to learn what was going on, but no one could answer their inquiries. As the blacks had come so they disappeared, and the curious gradually dispersed, or went into the hotel to finish the day over their beer. The landlord, of course, made a glorious harvest of the unusual commotion.

Meantime the poor woman had passed a fearful night. No sleep visited her eyelids, and she spent the long and weary hours sitting on the bed by the side of her slumbering child, alone with her grief and sorrow.

Edward came not—hour after hour elapsed, the morning dawned, the sun rose higher and higher, and her anxiety at last compelled her to go out to look after the unfortunate man. She went again to the shop, leading her child by her hand, and made a violent effort to ask after—the man who had bought some clothes there the previous evening.

"Oh, that one?" replied the shopkeeper, examining her suspiciously for a while. In the course of the morning he had seen the black police hovering about his house, and thought the woman was sent as a spy. "Don't know what has become of him—there is not much business to be done with such fellows. First he bought clothes as if he had his pockets full of money; he wanted them, certainly, and I let him have them at cost price; then he wanted drink, but had no money, and I was forced to take the rubbish back again. That's the way one has to get rich!"

"But, where did he go to?"

"Don't know; it is no concern of mine; are you his wife?"

The woman hesitated at first, and then answered with a low "yes."

"I thought so," growled the fellow. "Well, if he comes here again, I will send him home." With this he turned his back upon her, and went into the shop.

The poor woman wandered back to her home, as if in a dream. The child spoke to her, but she scarcely heard a word, gave no answer, and walked along in silence, with trembling limbs. It was now past noon; she gave the little one some milk and bread, but did not touch any food herself. The sun went down, and still the woman sat in her hut in silence.

At last steps were heard—they approached her door, and stopped. The woman raised her head, and listened.

"Papa is coming now, and will bring some bread," said the child, clasping her mother's knees. Louisa looked anxiously at the door. There was a hand on the latch, but nothing stirred. At last the latch moved, and Hohburg, pale, and covered with dust, trembling, and casting down his eyes before his wife's inquiring glance, stood upon the threshold.

Full half a minute he stood motionless in one position, and the astonished child's looks wandered from one to the other, wondering only why neither spoke, why neither stirred. At last, however, Hohburg could no longer bear it. He made a violent effort to control himself, closed the door behind him, and went to the table and supported himself against it.

"Good day, Louisa!" he said, at the same time, in a low voice, "good day, Lizzy! Have neither of you a word, a greeting for father?"

"Where have you been, Edward?" his wife asked, in a low and severe voice; "where is the money which I gave you? where are the clothes which you wanted to buy? where is the bread for me—for your child? Do not answer me," she interrupted him hastily, as he was about to open his lips; "do not defend yourself—do not excuse yourself—I know all. I saw with my own eyes how you squandered the last shilling which your wife and your child required for their bread! You are lost, Edward, and so are we."

"Listen to me, Louisa!" said Hohburg, as she buried her face in her hands, in an earnest voice, hoarse, and almost stifled with excitement. "Forget my past and fearful life—it ended with the scenes of yesterday. I saw the gulf on the brink of which I stood, and to which I brought you—I have escaped from it. From this day a new existence begins for me—for all of us. I will, I must, become another man, if we are not all to be lost. But I feel words alone will not satisfy you; I must prove to you that I am in earnest."

"It is too late!" replied his wife. "What you were not able to do with a vigorous body and sound mind you cannot accomplish now with good intentions, which the wind scatters as soon as they have left your lips. Your body is enfeebled, your spirit is broken—you are lost, lost beyond redemption."

"Not yet, Louisa! oh, not yet!" exclaimed the man. "My spirit *was* broken, but it is not the accursed drink, as you thought, that bent me down, and rendered me unfit for every honest occupation. A secret weight rested upon my soul, a dark shadow on my life, which has for many long years destroyed my strength, and almost driven me to madness. I will now remove the veil. You shall know the truth. I will lift from my soul the weight which oppresses it, and, with that confession, I shall not only give you the proof that I am

sincere in my desire to amend my life, but that I have, at the same time, also the *means* of so doing."

"The *means?*" exclaimed the woman, who had listened to her husband's strange words with astonishment and fear. She shook her head incredulously, and said, "What you wasted yesterday was our last resource."

"You wanted thirty pounds to set up a little business in Adelaide, free from all the cares about maintaining yourself, and—I have earned them."

"You?—how?" cried his wife, terrified as the thought rushed into her mind that, under the influence of drink, her husband might have committed a crime to obtain money.

"Be not afraid," Hohburg answered quietly, guessing her thoughts. "Although the money has not been earned by work, for my body is enfeebled, and my spirit crushed, still it has been gained honestly. Last evening not only threw a piece of good luck in my way, but also opened my eyes as to myself. I know how I have lived until now. I knew that you despised, perhaps hated, me, and that it is only the child which bound you to me. But I swear to you that from this day not a drop of brandy or wine shall ever pass my lips. I will free myself from the misery in which I have until now lived, and remove this weight from my soul, this canker from my heart, which has been gnawing it for many years—"

"I do not understand you," said the wife, with terror; "what is the matter with you? You are beside yourself."

Hohburg convulsively grasped the table against which he was compelled to support himself. His limbs trembled, his knees shook, his face was as pale as a corpse, and his eyes shone like burning coals in their deep sunken sockets. Drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and his long and neglected hair was matted upon his temples.

"Send the child out," he said, wiping his brow. "Send Lizzy out for a minute; she can get some flowers for you, and what I have to say to you is not for her ears."

"May I not stay with you, mamma?" asked the child, timidly, startled at her father's wild appearance.

"You can come back presently, my dear Lizzy," said her mother, kissing her forehead. "Now go out a little, and get me some of those beautiful red flowers which grow in the hedge. Bring a good many, Lizzy, and I'll make you a nice garland."

"I will pick the most beautiful I can find, mamma," said the little one, as she turned away to go out. At the threshold she stopped once more, and said, timidly, "But papa is not going to scold you, mamma, is he?"

"No, my child, certainly not; go now and get me the flowers, that's a good girl."

The little one left the room.

"And now," said Mrs. Hohburg, approaching her husband anxiously, "tell me what oppresses you; let me know what causes you such torment, for this uncertainty is worse than anything."

The man was silent, and looked steadfastly at her, and a strange light beamed in his wild, glaring eyes.

"You always wished to know," he said, at last, in a dull, hollow voice, "what drove me from Europe to Australia; what at night chased sleep from my eyes, and filled my dreams with pictures of misery. It was the same object of fear which drove me to the bottle, which made me try to drown in temporary inebriation the thoughts which gnawed at my very heart. You shall know now, but do not start away from me in horror. There dwells above us an all-merciful God, and it cannot be true that he will punish his children to the fifth and sixth generation. He will pardon—he must pardon—when the guilty one has atoned for his crime as fearfully and terribly as I have done."

The woman stood before him with her hands folded, an image of the most abject woe. She did not interrupt her husband in his confession; but her eyes were fixed in fevered expectation on his lips, in order to catch the tale of horror.

"You know," continued Hohburg, in a trembling voice, "what a terrible circumstance broke up our family circle in Edinburgh; you know the cause of my sister's death——"

"Edward!" cried the woman, in terrified accents, and stretching her arms towards him as if to stop him.

"O'Rourke," continued Hohburg, without noticing her movement; "O'Rourke was found dead in a garden; his murderer was supposed to be Mary's affianced——"

"Edward!" exclaimed the woman, "for God's sake——"

"I must—I must," groaned her husband, covering his eyes with his hand. "The fellow had mortally offended my sister; I met him after that in the garden; my blood boiled; I scarcely knew what I was doing—he fell——"

The woman grasped the table and clung to it; and Hohburg continued, in a low voice—"he fell by *my* hand. How I came into my bed," the wretched man continued, without daring to lift his eyes to his wife, "I do not even know myself: a fever confined me to it for months. Confused rumours sometimes reached my ears that the murderer had been apprehended and given up to puuishment; I almost went mad, and scarcely recollected myself who had committed the murder. My sister fell ill and died at the same period; and as soon as I could leave my bed and go abroad, we removed to London. The remainder you know. I could get no rest; I left England, and placed the ocean between me and my crime. We came to Australia, but a curse rested upon me and all that I undertook; money melted from my hands; I was miserable—inexpressibly miserable, and lost; but lost only until I found myself again," he exclaimed, suddenly raising himself to his full height. "Now, at this moment, I feel well and relieved. I have poured out my secret into your breast, Louisa, and henceforth we shall commence a new existence. Let it be ever so full of toil, at least I have shaken off the torture; and you, Louisa—Good God!" he suddenly exclaimed, as, raising his eyes, he saw his wife's face covered with ghastly paleness, her glassy and terrified eyes fixed upon him, "what ails you, Louisa? you are dying!"

"Leave me," she said, as he stretched out his arms to support her. "It is past—it was only surprise at this fearful deed."

"You can imagine, Louisa, what I have suffered with *this* burden on my soul for these long, long years."

"That you *did* bear it, I cannot conceive," she replied, as she looked at him with icy coldness. "And did you never once think of *your victim?* Did you never inquire what became of that unfortunate man, the affianced of your sister, imprisoned in your stead?"

Hohburg remained silent, and cast his eyes upon the ground.

"And it is with *that* thought," continued Louisa, shuddering, "it is with that *unatoned for* guilt upon your soul, that you wish to commence a new life. You can look at the blue heavens above you, and think God has pardoned your crime?"

"Louisa!" exclaimed the unfortunate man.

"Enough—enough! One thing more I wish to know.

You spoke of money which you earned yesterday in an honest, lawful manner. Tell me by what means?"

"Government," said Hohburg, without daring to lift his eyes to the angry woman before him, "have offered a reward for the apprehension of an escaped criminal. I chanced to meet the same man in the bush, and found him again here, where he had introduced himself under a false name, and as a German."

"As Dr. Schreiber?" said the woman, in a scarcely audible voice, and her looks fell upon her husband.

"You know it?" he said, looking at her with surprise.

A piercing laugh, more like a shriek, was the only answer.

"Louisa! for God's sake, what is this—what ails you?"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" cried the woman, pressing her temples with both hands, "God's judgment! God's judgment!"

"You are beside yourself!" cried Hohburg, terrified. "What is the matter with you! He is a criminal—a dangerous bushranger, who——"

"Do you know," cried the woman, scarcely mistress of her senses, and laying her pale, almost transparent hand on her husband's shoulder, which she seized convulsively—"do you know the name of that unfortunate man? Do you know whom you have betrayed?"

"Jack Loudon," stammered Hohburg, whilst a peculiar horror, he scarcely knew why, made his hair stand on end. For the first time he recollected the name which he heard escape from the lieutenant's lips.

"M'Donald!" screamed Louisa into his ear, "M'Donald, the affianced of Mary,—the innocent convict—the most unhappy man on earth, and *your* victim, man,—the victim of *your* murder."

She waved her hand and thrust him from her. Hohburg stood still and motionless, staring at her; his eyes almost started from their sockets; his face assumed a lived hue; and as he was turning away from her, he suddenly stretched out his arms, and fell insensible to the ground.

"In Heaven's name what is the matter?" exclaimed a voice from the door, through which Lizzy entered at this instant with an armful of red and white flowers, and ran to her mother, taking refuge between her knees. "What has happened, Mrs. Hohburg,—is it thus I find you?"

The woman looked at the speaker's good-natured and com-

passionate face for several seconds; but suddenly the recollection of former times dawned upon her; and she exclaimed, stretching her arm towards him:

"Captain Helger! God sends you to me in my greatest need. He is dying. He must not die; he must live at least to acknowledge his guilt in your presence."

"What has happened here? And is this Hohburg?—this picture of misery? Good God! can this be the man I left in Europe in wealth and happiness? What has happened? Speak—trust in me!"

"The most fearful thing that can happen," groaned the woman. "But not I—he must speak. Perhaps there may yet be time to avert the ill he has done."

"Yes; but then we must not be long about it," said the sailor, throwing away his hat, which he still held in his hand, and lifting the insensible man on the bed. Then he took a towel from a nail, and poured water upon it, in order to bathe his temples.

"If that confounded Dr. Schreiber had only come with me," he said, "we should have had a physician at hand, and the thing would be done in the twinkling of an eye; but these people are *never* where they are wanted."

"Dr. Schreiber?" said the woman, anxiously looking upon hearing the name; "where is he now?—what do you know of him?"

"Where is he? How should I know; very likely sailing about town; he was not at home when I called. Hallo! he is alive!" he suddenly exclaimed on seeing Hohburg open his eyes, which he closed again with a sigh. "Now, if we only had a lancet, or something of the sort, to bleed him! Perhaps he will do without that, he doesn't look as if he had too much in him either! What a wreck of a man!"

When the woman saw that the captain was occupied attending to her husband, she sank down upon the chair, near the table, and buried her face in her hands. Helger looked at her several times with an expression of commiseration, but did not speak to her, and only endeavoured to restore the still miserable man.

Lizzy stood at the foot of the bed on which her father lay. She had let some of her flowers fall upon the bed, and she wept silently, watching him with anxious looks, and with her little hands folded upon her breast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE EVENING OF THE BETROTHAL.

THE sun was sinking below the horizon, and everything in Lischke's dwelling betokened that an extraordinary feast was going to be celebrated. The table in the best room was laid for at least seven persons, and old Mrs. Lischke was busily engaged in the kitchen. There was nothing joyful in the house, and the members of the Lischke family walked about as if something disagreeable and highly annoying had happened, and as if a misfortune rather than a feast was awaiting them.

Susanna and her father were in the room. She had been weeping, and sat by the window in her mother's arm-chair. Her father paced the room with hasty strides, blowing the smoke out of his short pipe in thick clouds towards the ceiling.

"Wait—wait!" growled he, at the same time casting an angry look at his daughter. "Why wait! I suppose you want to wait till you are an old maid, or some duke or king comes to ask for your hand, eh? That cursed Baron is the cause of all this. I wish he had never entered my house. What have you got to say against Christian Helling, eh?"

"Nothing, father," replied Susanna, timidly; "he is a kind, industrious, honest man, and I think him well disposed towards me—but——"

"But?—If you know all that, what else can you desire? What *but* can there be?"

"I cannot fancy him as my husband," Susanna replied, in a low voice.

"No?" cried the old man, in wrathful astonishment, and stopping before her. "Did any one ever hear such evident and glaring nonsense? Not fancy him as your husband? But that hair-brained Mr. Von Pick—that corn swindler—the coal manufacturer, him you would fancy as your husband, wouldn't you? He suited you and your vain mother—to become Lady Baroness, Lady Pick, of Pick House, without having anything to pick or bite either. That would suit you, that would sound fine and grand, and we could act the great lady! Just think of that beggar, who has nowhere to hide his head, and no money to pay his debts, and be glad that an

honest man asked for your hand, and will make you an honest housewife."

"I am still young, father—I can wait years before I think of taking such a step."

"Young?" growled the old man, puffing another cloud of tobacco. "Young?—stuff. If you once live to be an old maid, no one will have you. In short, I want to put a stop to all this nonsense, which will go on until some honest man takes you under his roof. If you have no other objection than that of being eighteen years of age, it is mere stuff. Moreover, your father must understand the matter better than you do."

"But if I do not love him?" said the girl, facing her father.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried he, without deigning to listen to this argument. "Love him! These are all ideas you picked up at your parties. Love him! When I married your mother we did not *love* each other as you call it. We had scarcely seen each other more than twice or thrice before, and yet we agreed very well afterwards, and always got on very well together. Loving may be all very well with fine people, but what has a peasant to do with love? All that is required with us is, that the man and the woman who are about to marry should be fitted for each other; and of that matter the parents are the best judges. If your father, old Gotthelf Lischke, is satisfied with your future husband, it strikes me you ought to be so too, and thank him for it as long as you live."

"I *cannot* marry Christian Helling," said Susanna, suddenly rising, and walking towards her father, who looked at her with the utmost surprise. "At his side I should be the most unfortunate creature in existence, and if you really will *force* me, you must blame no one but yourself for the consequences."

"I am not afraid of them," replied the old man, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and pointing with it towards the daughter. "I'll run the risk, my darling. Cannot marry him! Stuff! as if marriage were a masterpiece which requires a five years' apprenticeship. Most unhappy being in existence indeed! I'll take care you shall not be unhappy, and for that very reason you shall marry him. But why the deuce did you write the letter to him yourself, and tell him you would keep your word, and invite him? Is

Christian Helling to be made a fool of, and invited and spurned at your whim or pleasure? Girl, I advise you not to provoke me! You have got over the old woman, and turned her head, and stuffed it with vanity. But I'll put a stop to this. You shall become a good housewife, for that we brought you up; and if you——"

"To that you have not brought me up," said Susanna, perceiving that her father was becoming more and more angry, and that no hope remained. She knew that, having gone so far, the obstinate old fellow would rather break than bend. She understood that everything was lost, and that no resource remained but the last desperate step. Her father should not say that she yielded readily, that she did not to the very last moment resist his *abuse* of paternal authority. She had nothing to lose, and she would relieve her heart. "Not to that, father," she repeated, as her father turned round with surprise; "why should I have learned all these things,—drawing, music, and so on, to be the wife of a joiner, who cannot even read or write?"

"That was your mother's fault," replied the old man. "I have always opposed those things."

"You suffered it; and now, when I feel that I am destined to be something better, I am to——" She stopped suddenly, concealed her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

If anything on earth could annoy the old man, it was the sobbing of women.

"Indeed!" he said, putting his hands on his sides; "you are destined to something better than to be the wife of a joiner or peasant? And pray what is your father, you foolish and absurd thing? Am I better than a workman and a peasant, and is the blood in your veins less honest because we are your parents? Now the murder is out! I see now where this devil of pride and vanity is! The apple is already rotten to the very core, and it is high time that the bad part should be cut away, for fear the fruit itself be lost. Be off to the kitchen and help your mother, and thank God you have a father like me; and don't let me hear such a word again as the last. Bless my heart! your husband will have to work hard to get these whims out of your head which your mother put in, and God knows who else!"

Susanna quitted the room before he had half finished his sentence, and the old man walked up and down for awhile in

great wrath, as if trying to drive away unpleasant thoughts by a more rapid motion of the body.

The only guests invited besides Christian were Dr. Meier and his wife, as their daughter had been prevented from accompanying them in consequence of indisposition. They fortunately arrived at this moment, and prevented Lischke's ill-humour getting the upper hand. He knew the clergyman to be an honest, enlightened man, and liked him accordingly; and of Mrs. Meier he had often spoken to his own wife as a model which she should seek to follow.

Old Lischke was rather puzzled at Christian's absence,—he did not know that the poor fellow had, for the last three-quarters of an hour been sitting in the garden, on the same form where he had first told Susanna of his love. He lingered in this spot, because he imagined that Susanna would be attracted to it to welcome him to her heart. Susanna came not; she thought not of the bridegroom waiting for her in the cold and damp evening air, and Christian was at last forced to give up the hope of meeting his beloved in this romantic manner. No doubt old Mr. Lischke, he thought, expected him in the house, and, always punctual, he would not pardon any delay on such an auspicious occasion.

"Well, Christian," said Lischke, when the youth at last entered the room, after having looked in vain for Susanna in the passage, "you are rather late, my boy; but, you are right —it is a work-day, and business before everything else. Have you seen Susanna?"

"No, father, replied the young man, after a few hearty words of greeting; "I could not find her. Everything is so quiet in the house, that I really felt very uneasy, and was afraid there was some one ill."

"Nonsense," replied the old man, with a laugh, resolved to keep in a good humour all the evening. "Who should be ill? The women are in the kitchen cooking and roasting with might and main; but Susanna will be here presently. This is a great day for her, and she may for once be permitted to leave the kitchen work to her mother. Speaking of illness," he said, stopping short at the door, and turning round to Dr. Meier, "have you heard nothing lately of Mrs. Hohburg? Dr. Schreiber went there, and he told me that her husband had returned, and one of my men says he saw the worthless gallows-bird drunk yesterday at Jemmy's."

"I heard as much myself, and intend to go to see the poor woman to-morrow morning. I was told she is ill."

"I do not think so," said Lischke. "Dr. Schreiber assured me she was up and well, and that she promised to call to-day. But as she has not come, we must look her up. She is a most excellent and hard-working woman, and deserves our assistance."

"Where is Dr. Schreiber now?" asked Mrs. Meier. "I thought he lived with you; or has he already taken fresh apartments?"

"No, not yet," replied Lischke; "but he went out this morning, and has not returned. He promised, however, to be back at nine o'clock at the latest. I must go and call the women; Christian is sitting so very disconsolate in the corner, looking at the door. When they have a piece of meat in the oven, they think it cannot be done properly unless they both watch it."

Christian remained sitting on his chair. He felt very sad, he knew not why; and had certainly pictured to himself a very different and more cheerful reception. He imagined that the old man appeared strange; and the stillness in the house, the darkened room, all helped to make him feel ill at his ease. The presence of the guests still farther embarrassed him; and then he could not conceive why Susey did not show herself. He had so much, so very much, to say to her; he felt so inexpressibly happy coming to the house, and now he felt as if he were in a strange place, where he was only expected to remain for a short time. Susanna's appearance did not entirely dispel this feeling. She was kind to him, and gave him her hand, which he pressed with fervour, but she did not return the pressure. The hand lay coldly and quietly in his, from which it was withdrawn, and given to the other guests. This, then, was the welcome from his bride.

"Now, girl," said the old man, perceiving that all were but ill at their ease, and anxious to conceal this; "now put the table to rights, and light some more candles, and then we may see each other, and settle everything, that we may not be again disturbed. We are all one family here—Mr. and Mrs. Meier I consider as belonging to ourselves—and we must not throw away the time in compliments, as people do at parties. Well, Christian, how do things stand with you?" he added, as if feeling it was his duty to set the conversation

agoing, and give his guests time to throw off the first chill; "have you sold your corn, or are you going to wait?"

"I have sold it, father," replied the latter, glad to speak on an indifferent subject. The guests all took breath. "I have no confidence in high prices."

"You have done right," said Dr. Meier. "I learn from letters which I received to-day that there has been a sudden fall in flour of 2*l.* per ton, and that in all probability it will get lower still. During the last few days, four ships laden with corn have arrived from Valparaiso, and advices have been received of several more which were on their way from the same port."

"That is good news!" exclaimed Lischke, rubbing his hands with great glee; "not only because I sold my corn at the right time, but on account of poor people, who will get their bread cheaper. I am also heartily glad that those blood-suckers, the corn usurers and speculators, have been caught again. Serves them right, and will make them more careful and less greedy in future. None of them are inclined to work themselves. What they want is to live in comfort and abundance by the sweat of the poor workman; and when they once meet with a run of luck, they blow themselves out like frogs in rainy weather. Then there are the wise men who hear the grass growing, and know exactly beforehand how high the corn will rise in the market. When, however, a wind comes across them, they sneak about as quietly as mice, and look very small and hold their tongues. Now and then one of the most sensible amongst them does himself and the world the favour to hang himself on some tree as a warning example."

"I am very sorry on my tenant's account," said Christian; "he is really unfortunate. I hear that he has purchased a great deal of corn at pretty high prices. The coal business has also turned out badly."

"Just what I expected," cried Lischke, with a stealthy look at his daughter; "but it won't hurt *him* so much as the people who were stupid enough to trust him. Well, what about the coals?"

"Why, that Johnson, who pretended to have discovered the coals, has suddenly disappeared with all the money. He went off to sea, and the coal business was all an invention."

"Good again!" exclaimed Lischke, laughing; "a blind man might have seen that from the very first. Plenty of

humbug in the business!—plenty of humbug! And Mr. Von Pick fancied he could induce me to be a partner."

"It was no fault of Mr. Von Pick's," Christian observed. "I believe he was himself cheated by that man."

"Don't be too sure of that," muttered Lischke. "No man confesses that he is a thief: and one never knows exactly how to take these people. Besides, Mr. Von Pick can have lost nothing by it himself, for he had nothing, and came to me to borrow money on the first cart-load of coals which was to be brought into the town, decked with flowers."

"I heard to-day, from a very good source, that he advanced money to Johnson," said Christian.

"Then he cheated some one else out of it," continued the old man, laughing. "I should only like to know who could have been such a fool as to trust him with money!"

Christian did not say a word; for only the day before he had done something very similar, and did not wish to acknowledge it to the old man, who would certainly have given him a lecture on his folly. However, Von Pick's family was very wealthy—he had told him so himself—and the money was safe enough. Strangely enough, however, it occurred to him at this moment for the first time, that his tenant had not yet paid him his small amount of rent for the whole of the last year.

Susanna listened to the conversation with feelings of the most painful nature. She knew that her father slandered her lover only to vent his anger upon him and to give *her* pain. Christian defended him. She felt an inexpressible pang in heart, and she would have given anything to go to her room and weep by herself.

The dog in the yard suddenly began to bark furiously, and old Lischke was obliged to go out to see what was the matter. Christian, in the meantime, got into conversation with Dr. Meier about the harvest and the price of corn, and only occasionally cast a glance at Susanna. The latter chatted with Mrs. Meier, asked her about her family, and did not seem to notice her bridegroom's presence.

"Heaven knows what's the matter to-night," said the old man, returning into the room. "It is usually quiet enough of an evening, excepting when the labouring men pass by; but to-night the dog keeps barking and growling in a strange manner."

"I thought I heard some one outside," said Christian.

"Yes," replied the old man; "there was a gentleman, who inquired after Dr. Schreiber. I think some one has been taken ill. He would not wait, and said he should call again."

"When I came here," said Dr. Meier, "I saw two of the native mounted police. I thought they had left Saaldorf to-day. Some of them, however, seemed to have stayed behind, and perhaps the dog scents them. These animals cannot bear the smell of a black."

"I cannot blame them," said old Lischke, laughing. "I like the room of the black fellows better than their company; and if they do belong to the police, they don't leave off stealing for all that. I should like to know what they can want hanging about my house."

"From what I heard Lieutenant Walker say himself last night," said Dr. Meier, "they were on the tracks of one, or even two bushrangers, who were driven from the Murray, and are supposed to have taken refuge in these settlements."

"Indeed!" said Lischke, "as if we had not enough *respectable* bushrangers among us to feed already. "Well, I hope they'll collar the fellows before they do any mischief; and then I shall have no objection to the presence of these black rascals here. Here comes my old woman! Well, that's right, mother; you show yourself at last. The girl can attend to anything else that remains to be done. Mrs. Meier has been waiting impatiently for you, and Christian also would like to bid his *mother* good evening."

"Mrs. Meier is very kind," replied his wife, shaking hands with the lady. "I am heartily glad to see you at our house; and I wish this evening may bring us all blessing and happiness," she added, with a side glance at her husband.

If this was intended as a hit, it passed harmless by him, for with a cheerful smile and nod, he said—

"That is her way; she *must* wish some one something, if it were only to herself, or else she is not satisfied."

"It can do no one harm to wish something good," replied the usually good-natured woman, almost angrily. "We *all* require God's aid, and wish for him to take us under his care and bless us, and—pride, Gotthelf—pride comes before a fall."

"Yes, if you would only apply that to——" exclaimed old Lischke, but quickly mastered himself, and said, taking

his wife's hand, "we must not quarrel this evening, Katharine; I know you mean well to every one, and it was only a joke. Is supper nearly ready?"

"If I only knew when the doctor is coming back," continued the old lady, forgetting everything else; "he was so uncertain about it; and still I should not like him to have his meal by himself. No doubt he has been detained by some patient. He said we were not to wait for him."

"We can wait a little while," observed Lischke, looking at the old Black Forest clock hanging between the door and the stove, "and we can wait for him until half-past eight, even if the roast should be done a little brown. He is a clever man, this Dr. Schreiber, and withal so quiet, and kind, and modest. He will soon settle this young jackanapes of a Dr. Fiedel. The young puppy keeps poking about everywhere; and he wanted to squeeze himself into my house, and talked big, as if he had swallowed all the wisdom. Hallo! what is that?" he said, suddenly, as a bark was heard under the window.

"I almost fancy that I heard a black coo-heeing," said the old man; and Susanna felt her blood rushing to her heart. She became deadly pale. Fortunately no one noticed her, as all eyes were turned towards the window, and she gained time to collect herself. Everything outside was perfectly still—they could hear the dog growling, but nothing stirred.

"It was probably one of that black troop," said Dr. Meier, going away from the window; "very likely they patrol the streets this evening, and this is their usual call. When they are *not* here, our own blacks at Saaldorf are very often heard in the same way. On the arrival of the police, they suddenly disappear as it were under ground. Even my blacks at the mission have not left their camp, and keep very still and quiet. They hate the 'civilised' blacks, whom they seem to regard as traitors to their race. In fact, they will have nothing whatever to do with them."

"I don't think it was anything," said Lischke; "besides, it does not concern us what they do in the streets; we have plenty to occupy us here. You know, my dear Doctor, that I have asked you and your worthy wife to do me the favour to be the witnesses of a family feast which we intend celebrating."

Whilst her father spoke thus, her mother kept her eyes

fixed upon her child, and the change that had suddenly taken place in her daughter's countenance did not escape her anxious eye. She made signs to the old man to wait awhile; but if Lischke perceived them, he did not pay the slightest heed to them, but only cast a look round the room, as if to assure himself that Christian and Susanna were both present. He then continued, in a cheerful but determined voice:

"This young man, Christian Helling, whom you all know, came across the sea with us, and has not only always proved himself to be an honest and industrious man, but through his industry and economy has also acquired sufficient to think of settling. He has asked me and my wife for Susan's hand, and we have both resolved upon giving her to him."

"And you may depend upon it, father," Christian remarked, rising and taking hold of the old man's hand, "that I shall devote my whole life to render her happy, if Susanna will trust herself to me. She shall not, I hope, ever have cause to repent of the most important step in her life."

"I am fully persuaded of that, my boy," returned the old man, with emotion. "Your heart is as good, and sound and vigorous as your body, and I know she will never want, so long as it depends upon you. But we shall assist you a little in that, I hope. Old Lischke has not been toiling and working these long years in Australia for nothing. I'll look to it that you make a good *start* in life—the rest must be your care."

"Christian is a kind man," observed the mother, with a desperate attempt to come to her daughter's rescue; "and he would, no doubt, do his best to render our child happy; but——"

"He will also, I hope, know how to make himself respected," the old man remarked, with a significant look at his wife. "The woman must love and obey her husband. Thus, at least, the Holy Scriptures teach us."

"My dear Mr. Lischke," observed the pastor, "I sincerely congratulate you upon your choice. Mr. Helling is known and esteemed by all of us as an honest and industrious man. Susanna herself is a dear, good child, and God will certainly bless such an union. I can only wish the young couple, who are destined for each other, all blessings and prosperity."

"And I do the same, with all my heart," said the pastor's wife, going up to Susanna and embracing her tenderly.

"Coo-hee!" The cry resounded clearly and distinctly, and seemed to come from the opposite meadow.

Susanna started, and all her limbs trembled.

"Father!" she exclaimed, freeing herself from the old lady, and walking up to him.

"You are a good child!" he said, without paying any more attention to the noise he had just heard. He nodded to his daughter in a friendly manner, but at the same time with a decided look, as much as to say that he allowed of no contradiction. He added, turning to his future son-in-law, "Come here, my boy; give me your hand, and you, Susanna—— but what is the matter with the girl?"

"Mother!" the latter exclaimed, throwing her arms round the old woman's neck, and kissing her. "Mother!"

"Come, my child," said the latter, with an anxious and trembling voice; "but why must you hurry things so, Lischke? You torment and terrify the poor girl."

"Oh, nonsense!" growled the old man. "What is the use of long ceremonies? Well!" he added, with astonishment, when suddenly Susanna, after having once more embraced her mother, rushed out and closed the door behind her. "That will never do!" he exclaimed, and was going to follow her; but Christian stopped him, and said, in a kind tone—

"Pray, father, give her time to collect herself. You have frightened the poor girl—it was too hasty and sudden. After a while mother can go to her, and Susanna will then be quiet and more collected."

"But I cannot bear such affectation," said the old man, with vexation; "she is a peasant's daughter, and nothing else, and she acts as if she were—God knows what!"

"You must not hurry your child," the pastor Meier remarked, kindly, to the old man; "give her time. So important a step must not be taken in haste."

"Well, I do not mind," replied the old man, with constrained good humour; "but I do not see why——"

"What is that?" cried Christian, who had all the time been struggling within himself, doubtful whether or not he should follow Susanna. "What is all that noise and shouting?"

The little party listened to the sounds and shouts which

reached them, and seemed to be quite close at hand. Yells like those of the savages were heard, while the watch-dog tore like mad at his chain. A sudden and shrill whistle resounded amid the noise, almost under the windows.

"I must see what is going on," said old Lischke, taking a double-barrelled gun from the wall. He sometimes used it to shoot vermin, which came into his fields and garden, and it was always kept loaded. "There, Christian, you take that sword which hangs behind the door, against the bed: one cannot tell what is going on, and the barn is close to the street."

"Pray, father, stay here!" said Mrs. Lischke, taking hold of her husband's arm; "if the blacks should——"

"Oh, nonsense!" growled the old man, extricating himself from her grasp; "there are plenty of police about, and we have nothing to fear. One cannot tell what they may be doing to the garden or to the fences, and I must see to it. Christian!"

Old Lischke, with his gun under his arm, followed by Christian and pastor Meier, went out of the house. They at once perceived that the noise was at some distance farther up the road. A crowd had apparently assembled. Without thinking much about it, they walked hastily towards the spot.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FLIGHT.

We left Red John in the storekeeper's parlour, where, by the assistance of Hohburg and the betrayal of his former companion, he expected to obtain sufficient to carry him through all his difficulties. All he wanted was money. Money he must have by some means, and he fully believed that what he desired was almost within his grasp. Before Jack Loudon could be warned by any one, the blacks would have surrounded and apprehended him, or shot him in the struggle. John was, however, too well versed in the country in which he had spent so many years against his will, to be blind to the dangers by which he was environed. He could not stay

in the house. The German might by chance, "in his stupidity," as he called it, betray him, which would be the worst thing that could possibly happen to him. Moreover, some of the blacks might light upon his tracks, with which they were but too well acquainted, and in that case he must certainly soon be caught. A tavern was the worst place of refuge possible for a bushranger, particularly one kept by a ticket-of-leave man, under constant surveillance. As soon, therefore, as he had gained his newly-found companion's consent to what he required, "Red John" prudently retreated to the bush, resolved to take up his night-quarters in some thicket or other.

He knew very well that he played a dangerous game in betraying his companion, and that he thereby partially placed himself in Miller's hands. He took his measures accordingly, and arranged with Miller that he should leave *his* share of the reward at the storekeeper's, stating that he would call for it at a convenient opportunity. If the fellow played him false, he might gain information of his treachery by a signal agreed upon with the tavern-keeper, in which case he would, of course, lose the money. At any rate, he could scarcely be in greater danger than that which now beset his path on all sides.

The storekeeper would not venture to cheat him out of the money—of course he was promised a good per centage—and as for the German, Red John did all he could to awe him by means of threats, and more he could not possibly do. After all, if the plan miscarried, it was only a common failure, and he would be thereby reduced to nothing worse than robbery and murder—flight and pursuit.

Red John had not seen any of the black police during his short stay in the German settlement, nor did he entertain the least desire to do so. In accordance with this plan, he spent the night in the bush, which commenced close behind the house, and he remained there until the morning.

It was not long before he had positive proof of the necessity of this caution. He had scarcely swallowed his breakfast in the small back room, into which he had crept early in the morning, and retired to a neighbouring thicket, when a detachment of the black police arrived, stopped at the house, and searched it from top to bottom. Naturally enough, they could not find any tracks upon the hard floor, and had to retire without

achieving the desired result. Although they pretended to go away, two of them remained behind, which stratagem did not escape John, who was lying on the watch.

His suspicions were aroused by a white man who several times in the course of the day visited the shop, apparently to buy something, although he always stayed longer than was necessary for such a purpose. The man was dressed in the ordinary costume, but John had far too practised an eye not to recognise in him, at first sight, a constable in disguise.

It was therefore evident that he was no longer safe. The fellows had got wind of him in some way or other; and John resolved to leave this dangerous spot, and seek some other hiding place. He endeavoured to put this project into execution in the most cautious manner. Aware how easily he might be discovered by anyone lying in ambush, he left as few tracks as possible, and he retired further into the bush, slowly, and, as it were, inch by inch. In this manner the day passed; but when the sun set, and the shadows of night grew darker, he thought he might relax his vigilance.

This determination, however, nearly proved fatal to him. He had just reached the skirt of a small clearing, and was going to emerge from the bush in which he was still concealed, when he saw something moving, and a few seconds afterwards recognised one of the blacks coming from the opposite side. After listening carefully for awhile, he retired again into the thicket whence he had come.

"A pretty business this," growled John, in a low voice, to himself, when the danger was for the moment over; "another step, and I should just have run into the hands of this black brute. A pretty business, indeed; and my gun is hidden just where the rascal is sneaking about. Of course he will not find it; but I cannot get it, and am in a most abominable position. This much is certain—the bush is occupied. What fine noses the brutes have! If I venture further I am sure to get into the clutches of some of them. I only wish I had my gun!"

He remained a short time perfectly still and motionless, listening in all directions, but nothing stirred. The bush was quiet as death: not a sound was heard but the wild screams of a swarm of white kakadoos, and once he was terrified by the laugh-like cry of a bird somewhat like the magpie, called in these parts the "laughing jackass," which suddenly resounded

from the very tree at the foot of which he was lying. With a suppressed, but no less hearty curse, he looked up at the bird hopping above him from branch to branch, but durst not stir, knowing from his own experience that the scream of the frightened bird would have immediately attracted to the spot the attention of some of the blacks who were lying on the watch near at hand. At last the bird flew away, and John began to think seriously of making good his retreat.

In this direction he could go no farther; that much was certain; and to escape by the way of the storekeeper's house would probably have been still more dangerous. The best thing for him to do was to remain concealed for a few days in one of the fenced-in fields. He had the necessary provisions with him, as well as a large quart flask of rum; and as to water, as long as he had rum he did not care much about that, and had frequently managed without it in the bush for many days. When his enemies could no longer discover any traces of him in the neighbourhood, and had apprehended Jack Loudon, they would withdraw of their own accord. If Miller had really betrayed him, nothing remained for him to do but to think of flight, which was, at all events, the best thing for him if practicable, as the arrival of the blacks had made the country far too insecure. If, on the other hand, Miller paid his share up, the money would not be lost, and he could return to fetch it at any time. First of all he must be sure that the blacks were not upon the watch.

Having made up his mind, he waited until twilight had set in, under the protection of which he hoped to effect his retreat. He began by feeling his way slowly and cautiously, watching every sound. He had the precaution to take off his boots, and to imitate as closely as possible the inward tread of the blacks. If they then came upon his tracks, they would not be able to make anything out of them.

It was dark when, after much trouble, he reached the road near the end of a fence, and he hesitated whether he should take to this broad and open road or not. His tracks would not be visible there, but he also ran greater danger of being surprised between the fences at some place where he might not be able to escape. He saw at a glance where he was. It was the last bush on the side of the town, and not very far from old Lischke's house. He was just going to climb over

the fence, in order to get into the field, when he heard a light carriage slowly approaching.

Having concealed himself in the bush, in order to let it pass, there was just sufficient light left to enable him to see that it was empty. The coachman reclined lazily upon his box, stopped now and then, looking carefully about him in all directions, and again allowed his horses to go on a few steps. John was struck with his behaviour. A coach was not, moreover, often seen on this road, and why should the man keep looking about so shyly, and stop on the roadside so close to the bush? Evidently all was not right. Could Jack Loudon have ordered the carriage for himself? In this case he was in a fair way of losing the fifty pounds. Or could Miller have failed to give the information? At any rate it was necessary that he should learn what was going on; and there was no need of his concealing himself from the coachman on a public road, on which numerous pedestrians might be met at all times. The best thing for him to do was to enter into conversation with the coachman, and a most favourable opportunity offered itself. From his box he had caught a glimpse of Red John under the shady tree where he stood, stopped the carriage again, and uttered a low but deep curse.

"Hallo, mate!" John suddenly said, without leaving his place; "where are you bound at this time of night, with your state-coach? You seem to be in a devilish hurry. It is a pity our road is not the same, or you might give me a lift on the box."

"Hallo, mate!" exclaimed the coachman, with surprise, turning round sharply to the spot from which the voice came; "who are you, pray, and what are you doing here?"

"I am on my way from Adelaide," John replied, quietly, "and am taking a little rest here. I have a thorn in my foot, and cannot walk very quickly."

"Ah! indeed. Are you acquainted with this neighbourhood?"

"I know a little about it. I have been up and down the road once or twice."

"Can you tell me, then, where an old German whitesmith lives of the name of Liske, or Biske, or some foreigneering name of the sort?"

"I was right, then," thought John. "Certainly, mate;

he lives not far from this. Is the old tinker going to take an airing this evening?"

"Oh! perhaps," grumbled the coachman, evading the answer, "if he thinks fit. But tell me, mate, is there no place in the neighbourhood where one may get a drop of rum? Hang it, I must have lost my flask out of my pocket, or left it at home, and am like a fish on dry land. I shall die of thirst during the night."

"Indeed!" said John, struck by the expression, which confirmed his suspicions. "There is a tavern further down, but it is a good distance off. Perhaps I can help you, mate. It is not fair to leave a fellow in the lurch; and I have more rum than I shall be able to drink to-day. Besides, I can get some more further on."

"That's a good fellow," cried the coachman, suddenly. "Thank you, mate; and if I could do anything for you——"

"Why, one doesn't know," replied John, passing his flask to him; "perhaps you may some day; more wonderful things happen. But if you are not in such a hurry, come down a minute. Are you going far to-night?"

"A good way," replied the coachman, putting the flask to his lips and taking a long pull; "Ah!" smacking his lips, "capital stuff this! But is it late?"

"To judge by the light, it must be past seven."

"Not later?" growled the coachman, returning the flask rather reluctantly; "then I have made a great mistake about the time."

"You are too early?" John asked, cautiously.

"Why—yes—a bit. How far is it to the house?"

"About ten minutes' drive. You have a nice pair of animals there?"

"Go like the very devil," said the coachman, glad of an opportunity to praise his horses; "and they'll have to get over a good bit of ground to-night."

"Let them rest, then, if you have time," said John, feeling pretty safe, as night was closing in. He thought as he had the bush behind him he had nothing to fear. "If you are going to drive the whole night, another drop of rum won't do you any harm."

"No, that it won't," exclaimed the coachman, readily; "you don't really think it is more than seven o'clock yet?"

"A quarter past seven at the latest. It was striking a

quarter to seven when I passed by the church at Saaldorf—at most, half an hour ago."

"Then I have a good half hour before me," said the coachman, gathering the reins and jumping down close by; John; "hang it, I shan't get such another drop of rum until I reach Gawlertown, and then, perhaps, all the shops will be shut."

"To Gawlertown? A good distance: the horses will get tolerably warm; but the roads are good. Are you going to spend the night at Gawlertown?"

"But, mate," said the man, after another hearty pull at the flask, "I must not talk out of school."

"Ha, ha! I understand," said John, laughing; "some one in debt and wants to cut. Well, it is no concern of mine; he owes me nothing, and I shan't peach; besides, I am not likely to come into these parts again, and know nobody here."

"Oh, no; it has nothing to do with debts," said the coachman, laughing (made communicative by the rum), and poking his new acquaintance in the ribs; "a love affair—you understand! They always pay best; we never have anything to do with a fellow who wants to cut from his creditors. Such fellows are glad to get away on foot."

"Love affair? ha!" repeated John, with a contemptuous shake of the head. "I never fancied any one had to do such things on the sly in Australia. I should say there are plenty of girls here."

"But not plenty of yellow boys," said the coachman, still hugging the flask with the evident design of renewing his attack. "Old Nishke or Pishke, as the fellow is called, is said to be very well off, and I have a good notion the girl will take a good bit of money with her for the journey."

"Phew!" whistled John, through his teeth. A new thought flashed across his mind, which made his heart beat quicker, inured as he was to crime. "I have no doubt of it," he said; "and, probably, the lucky fellow who steals such a wife will pay well?"

"I shall get six pounds if I drive them safely to Tanunda by to-morrow morning."

"That is not so very much, either," growled John, "when he will, perhaps, get five hundred through it."

"More, still," said the coachman, putting the flask to his lips; "I dare say I shall manage to get something out of

him to drink his health with. But here is your flask," he added, as he returned it to John a good deal lighter; "it must be time for me to be off. I am much obliged to you; the rum has done me good."

"You are to be at the house by eight o'clock?" said John.

"Yes, in front of the garden; but there will be some one waiting for me to show me the place." With these words he turned round, gathered up the reins, and prepared to mount his box, when a sudden blow from the bushranger's fist, struck with all his might, and with too good an aim, felled him to the ground, where he lay insensible.

John took the reins, pacified the horses with a few words, and fastened the reins to the fore-wheel. This done, he turned to his victim, took off his neckerchief, and with a practised hand twisted it into a gag, which he thrust into the powerless man's mouth. He then divested the man of his coat. With a few pieces of cord, which he always carried about him, he bound his hands and feet, and without further ceremony dragged him, still insensible, further into the bush. There he left him, quite unconcerned about his further destiny.

"Now, then," he growled, returning to the spot, and picking up the flask, which had fallen to the ground; "off now with this old jacket, and let me put on the more respectable one of my good friend, and then off and away from here with the post horses. My good stars have sent this fellow to my aid, and the black rascals will hardly suspect it is me on the box, should they meet me on the road. What about this fellow in the bush? Well, well! he is safe enough until the morning, and then they may find him for all I care. More bloodshed! It is, perhaps, better so, although it would come to the same for me in the end, and safe is safe."

He hesitated a moment, but then, as if altering his mind, he shook his head, changed his coat quickly, threw his old hat and jacket into the bush, took the whip, untied the reins, mounted the box, and a few seconds afterwards was driving slowly up the road to the appointed place.

It had in the meantime grown so dark that Red John could scarcely distinguish the objects around him. He met nothing on the road with the exception of an empty cart returning from town. Once he fancied that he saw a dark form standing against one of the fences between which he

was driving, but when he turned his head it had disappeared. He congratulated himself on the chance thrown in his way at the right, and indeed the most critical time. A clear and open road, with the means of placing a good distance between him and his pursuers without leaving any tracks, and a bag of gold of which he fully intended to rid the two young people at the proper time and place. What more could he desire? Once out of the circuit of human habitations, he would soon settle the man's account. If it could not be done in any other manner, he might upset the carriage, and gallop off upon one of the horses and bear the money away with him into the mountains.

He began, however, to be puzzled about the way. There was a house close by, but he could not tell whether it was the right one,

"Hist!" a low voice called, in the direction of the fence.

"Hallo," he growled to himself; "who have we got here?"

"Is it you, Bill?" asked the person behind the fence.

"Who else should it be? All right," he replied.

"Where have you been staying all this time? It is much after eight," said Mr. Von Pick, who had been waiting in the greatest impatience.

"Indeed!" answered John, feigning astonishment; "then my watch must be slow."

"Drive on slowly," whispered the young man, getting into the carriage; "I will tell you where to stop."

"All right," growled the coachman, applying the whip to the leader. "Woh, my beauty; gently, gently; don't let us knock against some old trunk of a tree."

They passed the house, the lower windows of which were lighted up, and shone brightly through the darkness. When they had done this, Von Pick whispered—

"Keep a little to the right, as close as possible to the hedge, until you come to the garden gate; go on slowly—we shall be there in a minute. By-the-bye, was it you 'cooheeing' just now?"

"No," said John, quickly; "did you hear anything?"

"It must have been over the way. Stop; that's the place; a little more to the right, so as to get under the shadow of the tree. That's it; here is the gate; stop now. The lady will come as soon as I have given the signal, and directly we

get into the carriage drive off, but not too fast at first. You know the way?"

"I should think so," John replied. All he knew was that he had to drive northward, in which direction the stars guided him, in order to reach the place to which *he* wanted to go.

"Very well; mind, not too fast at first, you understand; I do not wish to make too much noise. When we have proceeded a little distance, drive faster. You understand?"

"All right," said John, taking out his flask for another draught. He laughed in his sleeve at the idea that everything had turned out so well.

Von Pick stepped out of the carriage, glided to the fence, listened for an instant, and then putting his hands to his mouth in the shape of a funnel, gave the agreed-upon signal, a loud "coo-hee." This done, he hastened to the garden gate, opened it, and listened in breathless expectation in the direction of the path which led to the house.

Having waited there for ten minutes—and, naturally enough, the time seemed to him to be so many hours—a door creaked, a hasty step was heard upon the gravel walk, and in the next moment the trembling form of Susanna was clasped in his arms.

"My dear, dear child—"

"Away, away!" cried the latter, "I will follow you wherever you like. I will not, I cannot marry this man!"

"Everything is ready," whispered Von Pick, running to the gate, leading Susan to the carriage; "in a few minutes we shall be out of their reach."

Without making any answer, the trembling fugitive followed him, slipped out of the garden, sprang into the carriage, and threw herself in a corner, with her handkerchief over her eyes.

"Go on, my good fellow," said Von Pick to the coachman, as he followed Susanna into the carriage and closed the door; "drive slowly for a short distance, and then as fast as the horses can go."

"I'll take care of that," said John, as he gave the reins to the horses, and started on his journey.

Suddenly a not very loud but shrill whistle was heard through the darkness just before the horses' heads, and the animals shied and started back.

"What is that?" cried Von Pick, jumping up.

"The deuce take me if I know," said John, with a blasphemous oath, lashing the animals with his whip.

The whistle again resounded, and at the same moment three or four dark forms rushed to the heads of the horses, whilst others came out right and left, and placed themselves at both sides of the carriage.

"Hallo! what is that? Let go the horses, I say," exclaimed John, using his whip with all his might, with the hope of being able to cut his way through.

"Stop, in the name of the Queen!" said a stern and commanding voice. "If you stir a step, we shall bring you off your box quickly enough."

"Who is there? What do they want with us?" asked Von Pick, putting his head out of the window. "This must be a mistake."

"We shall clear that up in a minute," replied the same voice which had called out to the coachman. "Light the torches some of you—and, in the d—l's name, keep quiet! What is all that abominable noise about?"

The men who held the horses, now grown restive, tried to keep them quiet with coaxing words; but this only frightened them more, and they backed until the carriage ran right against the fence.

"Woh! woh! woh!" exclaimed John, interlarding his words with oaths and curses.

"The devil!" muttered Von Pick, putting his foot upon the steps, and trying to get out of the carriage.

"Back!" a voice thundered out to him, and he distinctly heard the click of a trigger.

"Oh, good God!" said Susanna, in an agony of dread and fear, hiding her face in her hands; "this is, indeed, a punishment for my crime!"

"It is all a mistake," said Von Pick, once more putting his head out of the window, with the vain hope of inducing the men to set him at liberty. "I have a lady with me, and do not know why you detain me."

"You shall, in a minute," said the person who seemed to direct the proceedings. "Where are your torches? how long are you going to be?"

"What is the matter here—what is going on?" cried several people, almost with one voice.

"Father!" said Susanna, almost breathless; and Von Pick, in a subdued but angry voice, observed—

"Are you already anxious to return to him?"

At that moment a small dark-red flame was seen in the middle of the road, and a number of torches were immediately ignited. In a few seconds, half a dozen of these glaring lights shed a flickering glare upon the amazed and strange groups in the road.

"Hallo! who is that?" said the sergeant, casting a hasty glance in the direction of the three Germans. "We shall see by-and-bye. Stand by there, and shoot the first man who shows the least sign of running away. Bring your torches here, and let us see what we have captured."

"My dear friend," whispered Von Pick, putting his head out of the carriage, "I have a lady with me, and I am very anxious that the people in this house—"

"Should not know that we have caught you?" said the sergeant, laughing. "I can easily believe that."

"I shall not be ungrateful," continued Von Pick, putting his hand out of the carriage.

"Bring the torches here," the sergeant cried, impatiently; "the voice sounds so precious strange."

Four of the black police hurried to the spot, with their flaming torches—two at the right and two at the left side of the carriage.

"The devil!" cried the old soldier, with by no means a pleasing look at Von Pick, who was thus caught in the trap. "It is not Jack Loudon, after all; and there is a lady with him, sure enough, my men."

"What is going on here? What is all this commotion about?" said Lischke, who had managed to get near enough to recognise, by the light of the torches, the pale countenance of Von Pick, although the latter, on hearing the voice, had fallen back into the carriage with the rapidity of lightning.

"Only a mistake," the old sergeant growled, discontentedly, "which has very likely spoiled the business. A gentleman and a lady—"

"A lady?" exclaimed the old man, feeling as if an icy hand had seized and crushed his heart. "A lady? and that knave with her? A light here! a light!"

With trembling hands, and unconscious of what he was doing, only feeling the horrible and choking sensation at his

heart, he gave his gun to the parson to hold, and took one of the torches from the black standing at his side. The light fell upon the shrinking form of his daughter, who dared not meet her father's gaze, and covered her face with her handkerchief.

The old man uttered not a word; but stood a few seconds, pale and motionless, and looked wildly at his unhappy and lost child. Indeed, he scarcely saw the wretched figure of Von Pick, who had retreated as far as possible in the corner of the carriage, wishing himself anywhere, to escape this unpleasant position. Another man, crushed and broken-hearted, witnessed the scene; need we say that this was Christian?

He too had recognised, by the brilliant light of the torch, Susanna and Von Pick. Never having entertained the least suspicion of an understanding between his bride and Von Pick, the discovery on such an occasion was indeed a terrible blow. Susanna, whom he loved more than his own life; whom he had hitherto thought so kind, faithful, and sincere, was false—was on the point of fleeing *from him*—and at one glance he saw the happiness of his whole life destroyed.

"Drive on, coachman!" the old man exclaimed, suddenly drawing back from the carriage-door, with a hoarse voice—"I have no child; and that woman may go where she likes."

"Make way there, you darkeys!" cried the coachman, who during the controversy felt extremely uncomfortable, seated on his box. "Look out, there!"

"Stop! stop!" cried Susanna, rushing past Von Pick, who did not offer to detain her. The sergeant, who stood by the door, opened it, and Susanna jumped out.

"Father!" she cried, with an expression of heartrending sorrow in her voice—"father!" and she tried to throw her arms round his neck. The old man turned away, and pushed her from him, not harshly, but with firmness. He would not allow his daughter even to lean upon his shoulder.

"I have no child," he said, in a low voice, giving the torch to a black standing near him; and having done this, he walked with a slow and firm step back to the house.

"Come, Susanna; come to your mother," said the pastor to the poor girl, who stood the picture of misery and despair in the road. He drew her arm within his, and led her back

to the house, whither Christian Helling followed, with seeming reluctance.

The torch-bearers next turned their attention towards the coachman on the box.

On the evening in question they had been posted by their lieutenant before Lischke's house, with strict orders to stop everybody coming out of the same, while they were not to interfere with any persons entering. At eleven o'clock all the entrances were to be suddenly occupied; and by this manœuvre Walker hoped to secure M'Donald, who had kept away from the house during the day. The mysterious carriage, the given signal, as well as the attempted flight of two persons, left no doubt on the minds of the blacks lying in ambush that the escaped convict had obtained intimation of the fact that he had been betrayed, and was thus endeavouring to evade the officers of justice. The sergeant, to whom Walker committed the direction of the proceeding, at last perceived the blunder he had made; and the scene between the father and the daughter at once revealed to him the true character of the affair. He still hoped that his plan might not prove altogether a failure, and that M'Donald, if he happened to be in the neighbourhood, might yet fall into their hands. It therefore became necessary to remove as quickly as possible every appearance of unusual stir, that, in case of his return, their preparations might not give him the alarm. The sergeant, therefore, gave the order to extinguish the torches.

Mahong, who was holding one of them, more from his old habit of leaving nothing unexamined which presented itself to him, than from any definite suspicion, had several times endeavoured, but in vain, to bring the light of his torch to bear upon the face of the coachman. With this object in view he held the flaming torch as high as he could; shaded his eyes with his left hand, which was disengaged, and looked at John. John, who had his own particular reasons for not allowing him to see more of his face than he could possibly avoid, drew his head into the high collar of his coat, which he had turned up round his neck, pulled his hat over his brows, and looked with both eyes straight at the tip of his nose; and his face, half concealed in this manner, assumed so strange but very

comical an expression, that another black, who was holding his torch close to John's eyes, burst into a loud laugh.

"Put out your lights there," said the sergeant. "We have nothing to do with this gentleman. I am very sorry, sir, to have frustrated your plans, as it appears I have done."

"You are very kind," returned Von Pick, with great rage, jumping out of the carriage, and putting his hat on more firmly. "I suppose you'll allow me to pass; I prefer *walking* home."

"Just as you please, sir," replied the soldier. "Let the carriage pass," he added, turning to his men.

"What's the matter, Mahong?"

"Wait a bit," replied the black, struck by the coachman's reluctance to let his features be seen. He examined his form from top to bottom, and discovered something which increased his suspicions—namely, the torn and tattered trousers of the supposed coachman, and his bare feet sticking in the thick boots. The sergeant also approached the box, and attentively examined him.

"Hallo, sir!" he exclaimed; "just be so kind as to look this way a little, will you? What a face the fellow is making, and how ragged he appears to be about the legs. Just get down, my good fellow, and let us see who you are. When we have satisfied our curiosity on that point, you may drive your old box where you please. Do you intend to descend, or shall we be obliged to help you?"

"Why do you stop me here upon a public road?" muttered the man, without obeying the order. "If that gentleman has done anything wrong, what do I care about it? I shall lose my fare as it is; make room there, and let me be off."

"Stop the horses, while two of you get up on the box and bring the fellow down if he will not come of his own accord," the sergeant called out, feeling confident that all was not right.

"Look out there," the coachman shouted, foaming with rage at the idea of having run into danger in so stupid a manner; "if you cannot let an honest man alone, look out for the consequences. Just mind the horses. When I get off the box they always start—make room there!"

Two of the blacks went to the horses' heads, and the others drew back a little to let the man jump down. John determined to seize upon this opportunity, the last, as he con-

cluded, of escape. Before getting off the box he took the whip in his hand. He jumped down, and, leaping up again immediately, struck the nearest man who stood in his way a blow on the face with the butt-end of his heavy whip, and bounded towards the garden gate. In the dark garden, full of bushes and winding paths, he might easily have escaped; and his sudden attack took the blacks so completely by surprise that the fugitive was enabled to reach the garden gate, against which he dashed with all his weight. His usual luck, however, failed him; the gate opened to the road, and a short but strong stake, driven into the ground inside, resisted the first shock. The next instant, before he had time to break the gate open, two of the blacks rushed upon him; one struck him a violent blow on the head with a heavy torch, making the sparks fly in all directions, and another seized him by the collar and pulled him back.

The bushranger, driven to desperation, drew a knife he had concealed to cut his way through his assailants; but before he could use it he was seized, and in a few seconds brought to the ground, overcome and powerless.

"Ah!" exclaimed the sergeant, while the prisoner, in spite of the terrible odds brought to bear against him, defended himself desperately with arms, legs, and teeth, "the fellow has shown his sting! Bring a torch and let us see who the fellow is. It cannot be Jack Loudon?"

"Red John!" exclaimed Mahong, with astonishment—"Red John!"

"Go to the devil!" cried the prisoner, grinding his teeth. Being at last completely exhausted, and unable to offer any further resistance, he allowed the police to secure him.

"Bless my heart, this is a good capture," said the sergeant, laughing. "I should like to know, though, how the fellow came on that box, and what his object could be in assisting a loving pair to elope. But he will give us all particulars himself to-morrow. Now, take him away; we have spent too much time over the affair as it is. Have you put the handcuffs on?"

"All right, sir."

"Very well; secure his feet well, and throw him into the carriage. One of you sit by him, and another drive to the Saaldorf Hotel, where you will watch him until I return. I need not tell you to keep a sharp look-out. Stop; what

noise is that?" he said, suddenly pausing, and listening attentively.

The sound of hoofs was heard on the road. A rider came galloping along, and stopped by the group. It was Lieutenant Walker.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, hastily; "whom have you got there?"

"Red John, sir; we found him on the top of the coach-box," the sergeant replied, with his hand to his cap.

"Ah! very well; has anything else happened?"

"No, sir; we have taken the wrong bird, but he will prove no bad catch either, and I was just going to place my men out again."

"It is no longer necessary," the lieutenant replied. "Draw your men off, and let them keep quiet."

"Very well, sir."

"Mahong, here!"

"Sir!" exclaimed the black, hastening up to his officer.

"Take my horse; I will follow on foot; mind you keep a good watch over the prisoner."

Having said this, the lieutenant dismounted, gave the reins to the black, and watched his men as they placed the bush-ranger, bound hand and foot, into the carriage. Then the procession set off, with the torch-bearers at the head and sides, and soon disappeared behind the hedges and houses of the little town which commenced at this spot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PURSUER AND THE PURSUED.

This evening, intended as a feast of joy at Lischke's house, was turned into sorrow and bitter grief.

Old Lischke stood in the middle of the room, with both hands upon the table, his hat still pressed upon his brow exactly as it had been when he entered, and he gazed in silence at the ground. His daughter hung upon her mother's neck sobbing in shame and repentance, and seeking to conceal her face on the maternal bosom.

For several minutes the silence of death reigned in the apartment, and the uproar outside could be heard distinctly. No one endeavoured to ascertain what it was all about. The blow had fallen too suddenly and too fearfully on the peace of their tranquil life to allow them to think of anything else. At last the old man drew himself up, turned round slowly, looked long and narrowly at the daughter, and said, in a cold, severe voice—

"What does the Lady Baroness want here?"

"Father!" exclaimed the mother, with an anxious and entreating look—

"My dear Mr. Lischke," said Dr. Meier, "judge not too severely. We are all sinners, and none are free from weakness as well as folly."

"I know what you mean, sir," the old man replied, shaking his head. "I feel I have perhaps been too severe; but this I have not deserved—this visitation in what was dearest to me."

"Your child still *lives*," replied the pastor; "and with the example of the All Merciful, the heart of the father cannot desire to be ever shut, cold and inflexible, against the sorrow and repentance of his own child. Peace has been disturbed in this house, but let us hope it has not been destroyed. Although the sun may set, we know that God in his paternal mercy causes it to rise again to bring new light."

The old man did not reply; his eyes wandered over the circle, and at last rested compassionately upon Christian, who was leaning against the window with a dejected countenance. He went up to him, took his hand, and said, in a low voice—

"Poor, poor Christian! I rejoiced so much at the prospect of calling you my son."

"Father!" replied the young man, with emotion.

"No, no; it is over now!" said the old man. "I would not insult you by the word."

"She is dying—my child!" cried the mother, embracing her daughter in great anguish; as Susanna sank down, and would have fallen to the ground had not the pastor, who was standing by, received her in his arms. His wife and Christian also hastened to the spot; but the old man did not stir.

"Take her to bed!" he said; and then, with a heavy step,

walked to the arm-chair, into which he sank, leaning his head on his right hand, with which he covered his face.

The pastor and Christian carried the prostrate form of the poor girl to her room, where they left her to the care of the women. Dr. Meier returned to the old man, endeavouring to comfort him; but the latter, without changing his posture, beckoned him with his left hand, and said:

"Pray, doctor, let me think over it by myself this evening. To-morrow, by the help of God, we shall speak further on the subject. I am unwell; my head aches and my heart——Rest will do me good. Some one is knocking at the door—pray, Christian, go and see who it is. No doubt it is Dr. Schreiber coming to the supper."

The old man laughed bitterly, but no one else spoke a word. Dr. Meier felt that he wanted rest above all things. The next morning he hoped would find him calmer, and bring some relief to his sorrow.

Christian went to the door, and returned in a few minutes, followed by Lieutenant Walker.

"Excuse my disturbing you," said the lieutenant; "I wished to see Dr. Schreiber upon very urgent business."

On hearing the strange voice, old Lischke looked up and said:

"He is not at home, but we expect him every minute. He promised to be back by nine o'clock at the latest."

"Will you allow me to wait for him in his room?"

"Pray, Christian," said the old man, without rising from his chair, "tell the girl to take the gentleman to Dr. Schreiber's room, and light his lamp."

"I am much obliged to you. Good evening, gentlemen!" said the stranger, as he left the room with Christian.

The pastor regarded for a few seconds the almost broken-hearted father; he went up to him, and, laying his hand on his shoulder, said, in a kind voice:

"I leave you now alone with your God. But, consider that you are a *father;* that it was your *daughter* whose foot slipped from the path of virtue. It is your duty to hold out your hand to her that she may not *fall*." Having uttered this, the pastor quitted the room, and soon after, accompanied by his wife and Christian, left the house of sorrow.

Lieutenant Walker sat at the window of M'Donald's room, with his arms crossed on his breast, and looking up in silence and meditation at the Southern Cross, which shone brightly in the firmament. Time passed rapidly—an hour he remained in this posture, without giving a sign of impatience. Below all was silent, and most of the lights which had first cast their rays on the fences, were put out. Nothing stirred—the stillness of death reigned in the house, and nothing was heard but the monotonous ticking of an old German clock, which, with its regular and loud motions, seemed to cut time into small pieces.

The lamp, covered with a dark shade, shed a subdued light over the room. Suddenly steps were heard in the street. The lieutenant listened: they came nearer, and stopped before the house. He could distinctly hear the key in the lock, the door open and shut again, and the steps of some one passing through the dark passage and ascending the stairs.

The lieutenant stood up, but remained by the window. A hand was laid upon the latch—the door opened, and M'Donald entered.

He looked pale and fatigued, but perfectly calm, and without perceiving the stranger, went to the lamp, lifted the shade, and raised the wick.

"Good evening, M'Donald," said the deep and sonorous voice of Lieutenant Walker; and M'Donald, on hearing these sounds, started back, as if stung by an adder. The surprise lasted only a moment. With his left hand he turned the shade of the lamp so as to throw the full light upon the countenance of his antagonist, and with the right he drew a double-barrelled pistol from his pocket, cocked it, and said, in a quiet voice, but choked with suppressed emotion:

"Lieutenant Walker, you have attained your aim; but probably in a sense different from that you expect. You have ventured within the power of a desperate man, and must bear the consequence. For my own part, I am tired of this life. Hunted, pursued like a wild beast, with the blood-hounds on its track, night and day,—who would wish to live thus?"

Lieutenant Walker listened to him quietly, with his arms still crossed upon his breast. At last he said—

"What if I did not come as an enemy—if I brought you peace and quietness, M'Donald!"

"Those are only to be found in the grave!" the unfortunate man replied, in a hollow voice.

"Put down your weapon, sir," continued Walker, in an almost friendly voice. "I am alone; my men are not in the neighbourhood, although they were lying in ambush round the house for an hour or two."

"Betrayed, after all, then," said M'Donald, with a bitter smile.

"You have no cause to complain of that," replied Walker, laughing. "Do not look at me so gloomily. If my heart were not at this moment light and glad—if I brought you only imprisonment and fresh tortures—I should certainly not be laughing. But to-morrow's sun will find you a happier man. I bring you life and liberty."

"You?" exclaimed M'Donald, with astonishment, yet not without suspicion.

"It may appear strange to you," said Walker, laughing, "that a lieutenant of the police should engage in such, I might say, negative occupations; but such is the case, nevertheless. But—" he added, suddenly, in a frank manner, "be assured, M'Donald, that, from the day when we fought side by side against the blacks, I felt you were a different man from what the world supposed. From that day it was with reluctance that I fulfilled my duty. I certainly endeavoured to execute it, because it was my duty."

"I do not understand you," said M'Donald, astonished at the extraordinary conduct of the man.

"I will no longer keep you in suspense. Let us sit down!" he added, as, unbuckling his sabre, he placed it in a corner, drew a chair to the table, and sat down. M'Donald, who still held the pistol in his hand, laid it upon a chest of drawers, locked the door to guard against any surprise, and also sat down to the table.

"Still suspicious!" observed Walker, laughing. "But—you are right. I have hitherto done nothing to entitle me to your confidence. Listen to me quietly; the sequel of my short narration will perhaps give you a better opinion of me."

"We met yesterday for the second time, in company," the

lieutenant commenced, with a smile; "and I must confess the blue spectacles and your German entirely deceived me. I had no notion you were so well acquainted with a foreign tongue, although your figure and appearance seemed familiar to me. This morning an old acquaintance of ours, allured by the hundred pounds reward offered for your apprehension, disclosed to me that Dr. Schreiber, at Lischke's, was no other than the notorious Jack Loudon."

"Red John!" exclaimed M'Donald, with a smile of contempt.

"Not exactly, although I have since heard that gentleman had a hand in the affair. We caught him this evening, and he will soon get his richly-merited reward—the gallows. No: the informer was once a hut-keeper upon Mr. Powell's station, who was known there under the name of Miller, but whose real name is Hohburg."

"Hohburg!" exclaimed M'Donald, starting from his chair with horror. "That was Miller! Now I understand why that face seemed so familiar to me, and the strange and inexplicable feeling which always came over me when I looked into those eyes!"

"Pray sit still!" said the lieutenant; "you will hear things stranger still. The fellow looked horrible, with his matted hair, pale face, deep-sunken eyes, and trembling limbs—indeed, the very image of one ruined by drink. I was bound to make use of the information, M'Donald; but I give you my word that I would sooner have struck the informer to the ground than arrest you. I therefore issued my orders, sent a constable here in disguise to inquire after you, and surrounded the house, which was to have been searched by my men somewhere about this time. I committed to my sergeant the execution of the enterprise, as I did not wish to have anything further to do with it myself."

"And now?"

"I have sent my men to their quarters, and come to talk over with you the events of this day. Listen. I thought you were under the penalty of law, but I also thought that you were not to be classed with ordinary criminals. Not wishing to see you after you had been arrested, towards evening I rode out of Saaldorf, in order to pay a visit to the

magistrate of the next town, intending to return to-morrow morning, when all should, as I hoped, be over. On my way, at a short distance off, I passed a small house, which stands alone by the road-side, nestling in the bush. Hearing wild and heart-rending cries, I stopped my horse. The next instant the thought struck me that my men had maintained; they had come upon the tracks of Red John in this neighbourhood. The cry of terror inside was perhaps, I thought, his work; and, turning my horse, I sprang out of the saddle, threw the reins over a bush, took the pistols out of the holsters, and rushed to the door of the hut. I found my weapons were not wanted, but my presence was the more opportune.

"In the middle of the poor but clean room a man was stretched out upon a mattress. This was Miller, or Hohburg, in a state of madness. A pale woman sat in the corner of the room, with clasped hands and fixed looks, and a man, the captain of a German ship in the port of Adelaide, was kneeling by his side. The woman did not even notice my sudden entrance with pistols in my hands. Her eyes wandered meaningless past me, and were again fixed upon the ground. The captain seem delighted at my arrival, and, in a fearful state of agitation, he took hold of my hand and led me to the couch of the unfortunate man.

"M'Donald," continued Walker, after a short pause, during which he appeared agitated in an unusual manner, "I will no longer keep you on the rack. You were transported for the murder of an Irish gentleman. Do not interrupt me.—I this evening took the depositions of the real murderer, who acknowledged his crime."

"Hohburg!" cried M'Donald, horror-stricken. "Good God!"

"Stung with remorse," Walker continued, with emotion, "and feeling the approach of death, he acknowledged in my presence and that of the German, his crime, and—your innocence. Then he tried to rise, to go to Adelaide and give himself up to justice; but his enfeebled body was completely exhausted. He sank back upon the couch and died, uttering curses, in the arms of the captain."

"Horrible!" exclaimed M'Donald, covering his face with his hands.

"The monster, who in cold blood brought ruin and misery upon you, does not deserve your compassion," Walker said, gloomily. "The demon, drink, to which he devoted himself, has saved him from the gallows, which he deserved a thousand times more than even that tenfold assassin, Red John."

"And the poor, poor woman——"

"She may thank God that she is delivered from the bonds which bound her to such a wretch. She is now in safe hands. The kind captain has charge of her and the child. He tells me he is well acquainted with her family, and that he intends to take her back to Germany. He requested me to ask you not to go and see her in her present state. The last fearful scene has produced such an impression upon her that any new emotion, which your presence could not fail to excite, might prove highly prejudicial. Leave her to time and to the captain's care. Besides," he added, with a smile, "I should think the favourable change that has taken place in your own affairs will afford you sufficient occupation."

"It seems like a dream to me. My head turns dizzy when I think of it," said M'Donald, pressing his temples with his hands.

"Then I will think for you," said Walker, laughing. "You must first of all accompany me to Sydney, to which place I shall return by the first ship, as my mission here is performed. The sergeant will return with the troop overland through Melbourne."

"To prison!" M'Donald exclaimed, in anguish.

"In very easy custody," replied the officer, with a smile. "Captain Helger, as he is called, will, I think, touch at Sydney with his ship, and our joint testimony will be sufficient to obtain your liberation on parole, until an answer can arrive from England. There can now be no doubt that an immediate pardon will be granted. Then," he added, with a smile, "when that is done, I shall be ready to give the free man any satisfaction he may like to demand for the trick I was obliged to play him on the Murray."

"Walker!" exclaimed M'Donald, jumping up from his chair, and seizing the lieutenant's hand, "you are a man of honour, and my hand shall wither before it shall ever be raised against you!"

"For your sake, M'Donald," replied the lieutenant, shaking

the proferred hand heartily, "be assured that this moment is one of the happiest of my life, and that I hope we shall become good and true friends. And now, good night! Of course it is not necessary for any one at Saaldorf to know that Dr. Schreiber is only an assumed name. You must even, for the short time that we remain here, wear the blue spectacles. Call upon me to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, at the Saaldorf Hotel. The captain will be there, and we can then settle what is to be done."

The two friends parted. The lieutenant cast another glance at the house, as he was going down the street. A dull light was burning in the room upon the ground floor, in which old Lischke was still seated in his arm-chair by the window, with his head resting upon his hand, in precisely the same attitude as the visitor had found him two hours before. He did not even stir when the house-door was opened and closed again—very probably he did not hear the noise, for the bright and big tears trickled through the old man's quivering fingers and fell upon his knees.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NGUYULLOMAN.

FIFTEEN months had passed away; the winter rains had refreshed the land, and the young grass was shooting forth luxuriantly. Everything looked fresh and blooming, and even the monotonous gum-trees appeared to be full of sap, and seemed vigorous after the refreshing showers.

Three horsemen came galloping along the road from Adelaide, stopped at the Saaldorf Hotel, and vaulted from their saddles. Two of the travellers were white men, the third was a black, who held the horses while the others entered the parlour of the hotel to take a glass of wine. They found but one guest, sitting before a pot of beer, in the room. On hearing the strangers enter, he turned round slowly to have a look at them; then jumped up quickly from his chair, and ran to meet them and give them welcome.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, "Lieutenant Walker, where, in all the world, have you been this long time?"

"At Sydney, my dear Dr. Spiegel!" replied the officer, "and I am heartily glad to see you again. Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing myself to you as a *captain*."

"I wish you joy, with all my heart——"

"And at the same time to call to your remembrance an old friend."

"Indeed—very happy," said the doctor, looking attentively at the captain's companion. "I certainly do not know that face; but I really must beg a thousand pardons if I——"

"Well, that is not bad!" said the officer, laughing; "has Dr. Schreiber changed so very much during fifteen months that you cannot recognise him?"

"Dr. Schreiber, by all that swims, as Captain Helger would say!" he exclaimed, with an expression of delight, holding out his hand to the stranger, "I give you my word, I should not have recognised you."

"Why, have I grown so very old?" asked M'Donald, with a smile.

"Old? It is young you have become! You look rosy

and blooming. But the beard and the long hair alter you, and then——I think you used to wear spectacles?"

"His eyes have improved wonderfully," said Walker, tapping M'Donald on the shoulder. "I gave him the medicine, and it answered remarkably well."

"Then, my dear Captain," said the doctor, "if you really are an oculist, you could render me a great service. My mother has lately suffered severely in her eyes, and——"

"Oh, my dear friend," replied Walker, laughing, "that was a cure which a weak woman could not stand. A truce, however, to these trifles. How are you getting on, Doctor?—what are you doing at Saaldorf?—how are all things going on? It strikes me you look rather pale and thin."

"Oh!" replied Spiegel, with a sigh, "there has been many a change since you left us. You should not have quitted the place, Doctor. Your departure was a great loss to us, particularly to myself. My poor wife might have been saved if I could have procured good medical advice."

"Is your wife dead, then?"

"Yes; she died six months ago. The jackanapes of a doctor we had—you recollect that Fiedel—works at random, without the least experience. He is responsible for the deaths of many at this place, and was at last compelled to leave Saaldorf. We only got another doctor last week: a barber from Bremen, who calls himself a ship's doctor, and who physicked the passengers in return for a free passage. You could not do us all a greater pleasure than by remaining with us."

"Not now, my dear friend," Walker replied; "we are bound for the Murray. Yet I cannot say that he may not return at some future period and settle amongst you. We have some important business to transact there."

"And in order to reach the Murray you come from Sydney through Adelaide?" said Dr. Spiegel, with astonishment.

"That is certainly the longest way, if you reckon the sea voyage; but the road from this is so much shorter and more convenient for the horses; and as an English man-of-war offered us a free passage to Adelaide, we did not wish to let so favourable an opportunity slip."

"Can you tell me, Doctor, how Mr. Lischke's family are

getting on? The poor people were in great sorrow when I left them," said M'Donald.

Spiegel looked grave and shook his head. "Very badly," he at last replied; "very badly. That was a very sad affair; and that Mr. Von Pick, who stole away the night that it occurred, was a worthless fellow and a common swindler. He abused my confidence in the most scandalous manner; but treated the Lischkes, and particularly poor Helling, most shamefully. Poor Christian took the affair so much to heart, that he has since avoided every one—sees no one, and seems to be out of his mind. Susanna left her parents' roof, and went to reside with some relations at Hahndorf; and old Lischke looks quite ten years older than he did before the affair. However, people always talk more than they have cause to. Just fancy, Doctor, after you left, the rumour got abroad that you were a bushranger in disguise, belonging to a very high family, and that on this account Lieutenant Walker took you off quietly and put you again in safe custody."

Walker looked at M'Donald with a droll smile about his lips, and the latter replied—

"The rumour was not altogether ungrounded. You perceive that I am still under the surveillance of the police."

"Yes; such a surveillance is not very strict," said Spiegel, laughing. "For my part, I believed you had returned to Europe, and envied your good fortune in that respect."

"You!—why?" exclaimed Walker. "Are you not happy here? What do you want to do in the old country?"

"Happy!" he replied, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I do not wish to complain; that is not my way; but I have experienced many sad and bitter hours during the last fifteen months."

"Your poor wife——"

"Yes; even without including that misfortune in the list," said Dr. Spiegel. "Her sufferings are over now; she never could reconcile herself to Australia, and always longed to return to Germany. I have been very unfortunate with my land, too, and lately sold it all at a mere nominal price, in order to escape further litigation and embarrassment. I am a lawyer myself, but I should not like to go to law in Australia."

"A pretty recommendation for your clients," said Walker, laughing. "How do you employ yourself now?"

"I am working very hard at my novel," replied Dr. Spiegel, and his hand almost involuntarily was raised to the breast-pocket, in which he carried the manuscript. On reflection, he seemed to think that the moment was not well suited for the purpose, and he let his hand drop at his side and continued—

"It is the only thing which still keeps me up in this material and horribly practical life. Were it not for this occupation, I should long ago have been ruined, both morally and physically."

"You carry on your business at the same time?" asked M'Donald.

"A very poor business it is; indeed, scarcely worth mentioning. All my hopes are centred upon the novel, for which I expect wonderful popularity, both in England and Germany. But, gentlemen," he said, on seeing the two travellers empty their glasses and prepare to start, "you are not going away again so soon? I cannot allow that, on any account."

"You must excuse us this time, my dear Doctor," Walker replied, with a friendly smile; "on our way back we expect to make a longer stay here. We have not yet forgotten our old friends, and hope shortly once more to enjoy their society."

The horses were brought, and the riders soon got into their saddles.

"By-the-bye!" Dr. Spiegel called after them, "I suppose you know that Captain Helger took Mrs. Hohburg and her child to Europe? The captain behaved very nobly, and is a most worthy man."

"We heard something about it," replied Walker, steadying himself in the saddle.

"Hohburg himself died of delirium tremens. That, after all, was lucky. You will not stay then?"

"We have a long day's journey before us, my dear Doctor. So, farewell for the present."

"Remember me to the Lischkes, if you see the old people," said M'Donald. "I hope I shall be back before long, when I shall give them a call myself."

"And then you will stay with us!" Spiegel shouted to the riders, as they were already on the way.

"Perhaps!" was the reply. Once more the horsemen waved their hands, and disappeared round the corner of the street.

They soon left the little town behind them, and rode briskly and merrily along the road which led, north-east, over Tanunda and through Angas Park, towards the Murray. At Tanunda they stayed the night, and on the following evening they reached Miranda, on the Murray, whence they followed the upward current of the river.

The country assumes quite a different aspect as the traveller leaves the Adelaide hills and enters into the broad valley of the Murray. At this point the malley-bush commences suddenly, with the so-called tea-bush, the salt-bush, and the prickly grass, or pig's face; and for thirty miles no fresh water for man or horse is to be found, excepting after a sudden shower of rain! The wells only yielded a brackish sort of water, unfit for drink.

Numerous kangaroos, which animals manage with very little water, enliven these deserts until one's eye falls upon the high and mighty gum-trees, growing with luxuriance along the Murray, and following this river along its whole course in a broad belt.

Between the malley-bushes the soil is hard and sandy, and this is particularly well-adapted for horses. On reaching the real valley of the Murray, with its gum-trees and swamps, the ground is changed into a greyish clay, which, when dry, cracks, and is easily reduced to dust. When wet, it sticks to the horses' hoofs like glue, and renders the progress of man and beast extremely difficult and laborious.

Near the Lower Murray, the road almost always leads over high and sandy malley plains; and when it does skirt the river, the traveller can easily, in wet weather, take to the hills, keeping the bed of the river in sight.

In this manner the riders, on the fifth day after their departure from Adelaide, left the road, which ran on their right into the low valley of the river, and rode along between two sandy malley hills. A heavy rain had fallen the night before, the clayey soil had not yet had time to dry, and not only was the road which they took lighter for the animals, but at the same time they cut off a bend of the river which at this spot ran southward.

Mahong was riding in advance, in order to pick out the best path, and the two white men followed him slowly.

"Walker!" said M'Donald, suddenly, after a short pause, "you must allow me to ask you one question, which has long been tormenting me, and which I never yet had the courage to ask you?"

"What is it?" the officer asked, with a smile, turning towards him.

"Since we met at that German's house," replied M'Donald, "you have always proved yourself a true and faithful friend. I am indebted to you, I know full well, for the speedy and favourable answer from England, and for the good treatment of those who, until then, considered me as a prisoner."

"Did you not merit all this for the numerous sufferings to which you had so long been unjustly exposed?"

"That makes no difference," replied M'Donald. "I only mention this to show you how much I feel indebted to you—how anxious I am to repay you for your kindness, and how willingly I should keep from you everything, the remembrance of which might be disagreeable to you: and now——"

"I am riding with you to the same spot," Walker interrupted him, laughingly, although his open and good-natured features were suffused with a deeper red,—"where I got myself rejected just a year and a half ago, and where I have at present no greater prospect of success than before. Is that what you wished to say?"

"No, not exactly in those words, Walker."

"Bah! it is all the same," said the officer, laughing. "That was the sense; and in one way you are right; but," he added, gravely, and with his eyes growing brighter, "there was another ground which led me to ask leave of absence, and I do not see why I should conceal it. That evening, M'Donald, when I took you a prisoner from the family circle dear to me—that evening—I may tell you now—has since been a thorn in my heart. I knew very well I *could* not act otherwise: I only did my duty; but I am afraid Sarah thought differently. I felt too plainly, too painfully, that she ascribed my action to the jealousy of a fortunate rival, and how she must despise me. I will bear this no

longer. Although I cannot gain her *love*, I shall win back her esteem. You see," added the young man, as M'Donald silently took his hand and pressed it, "that it is not only my friendship for you, but also my selfishness, that has brought me here. The whole family hated me for taking away one who had become endeared to all of them; is it not my duty to restore him back to them, and get in exchange at least a kind look?"

"You wrong the Powells!" said M'Donald. "Do you think they have forgotten your noble devotion, when, at the peril of your own life, you saved 'Lisbeth; and afterwards, with real contempt of death, threw yourself into the very thickest of those black demons? I will grant, that in the first moment, the Powells were perhaps less kindly disposed towards you; but after calm consideration they could not fail to perceive that you were right, and acknowledge that, forced as you were by necessity, you did nothing but your duty."

Walker looked down as if in a dream. He suddenly passed his hand over his brow, as if he wanted to drive the sad thoughts away, and said to his friend, with a frank and open expression of countenance—

"We will hope the best, M'Donald. Although no such sweet welcome awaits me as you may expect, yet I shall be heartily rejoiced to see the kind people again, after such a long absence, and under more cheerful circumstances. I think my presence here proves to you that I do not envy your happiness. But what is the matter with Mahong? He has dismounted, and is examining some track. Let us see what he has found."

Putting spurs to their horses, both riders galloped forward in the narrow Malley Vale, and soon reached the spot where Mahong, leading his horse by the bridle, was following some track, leading in the same direction as that in which they were going, and apparently examining it with the greatest interest.

"What is the matter, Mahong?" asked Walker; "anything new?"

"New?" growled the black, quietly pursuing his investigation,—"old acquaintance."

"An old acquaintance?" exclaimed the officer with

astonishment, and hurrying to the side of his servant; "what is his name?"

"Nguyulloman!" replied Mahong, casting a shy glance around him, as if afraid that the mention of the name alone would conjure up the ominous form of the cripple.

"Nguyulloman? So it is," said Walker, easily recognising the peculiar tracks of the cripple's hands on the sands. "But what is this? there are tracks of boots—Nguyulloman surely did not wear them?"

"No," said Mahong; "those belong to a white man—Nguyulloman crept upon them like a snake."

"After him?"

"Yes; white man has walked in the rain; Nguyulloman after him."

"Have you seen no tracks of other blacks across the road?"

"None," replied Mahong, without taking his eyes from the ground.

Walker was too much interested in the discovery to renew the conversation with M'Donald, who followed, lost in his own thoughts, which were of a much more pleasant nature. Mahong maintained that the black must have had some design or other, or else he would not have kept so closely to the tracks, as he might frequently have chosen a much more convenient path. When the travellers left the malley hills they found the tracks went in a straight line towards the river. The black had evidently rested himself in a small thicket, and afterwards had followed again the direction of the tracks, but not kept on the tracks themselves.

Following these tracks, the travellers at last reached a spot, about three or four hundred paces from the river, where a fallen gum-tree and a quantity of underwood, broken by the fall of the tree, covered the ground. The white man seemed to have chosen this place for his night's rest; the tracks led to it, and at the root of the tree there still lay a heap of coals slightly covered with ashes. Mahong stirred the coals with a stick: they still glowed, and had evidently been only recently abandoned.

So far everything was right; but, strangely enough, from this place the tracks of the boots entirely disappeared, whilst those of Nguyulloman's hands and his creeping body re-

mained distinctly visible, leading towards the bend which the river took at this spot. Mahong walked round the place several times, shaking his head suspiciously.

Suddenly they heard wild shouts and cracks of whips coming from the east, and they led their horses a little into the bush to let the supposed herd pass, before continuing their own journey. They saw through the branches that the drove consisted of horses, and with the interest which every native of Australia, and particularly every Englishman, takes in these animals, they came forward a little to have a look at the fine, well-bred horses driven by.

There were about sixty or seventy of them, fresh from the run, full of vigour and spirit, and the keeper's task, to keep them together on the right road, was by no means an easy one. They were all tied together, two and two, and if a couple of them did run away they soon became entangled in the bush, and were easily brought back to the rest.

M'Donald rode a fiery young horse which he could scarcely master, and this animal greeted his passing comrades with a loud neigh. Some of the herd answered, and the stock-keeper on the left side had the greatest difficulty in preventing them from rushing to the spot where they heard the neighing. When he had got his own animals together again, and driven them forward, he rode to the place where he had heard the strange horses, to see who was there.

This stock-keeper had a sun-burnt, bearded countenance; his straw hat, which had already seen a good deal of service, was fastened with a ribbon under his chin, and in his right hand he carried a long and heavy stock-whip. M'Donald at once recognised his old grey horse, and giving his own animal the spurs, galloped towards it.

"How do you do, Mr. Bale?" he called out. "Is the old grey still alive?"

"Mr. M'Donald, as I am alive," shouted the honest stock-keeper, in his joy, cracking his whip, that the report of it resounded in the wood like that of a pistol. "Again in the bush, and——" he paused on catching sight, close to him, of the well-known face of the chief of the native police—"and Lieutenant Walker."

"Who is heartily delighted at having the pleasure of seeing you again!" exclaimed the latter, galloping up to M'Donald.

"Yes, but, gentlemen," said the stock-keeper, lost in amazement, "how, in all the world, do you two come together here?"

"That's too long a story to tell in the saddle," replied M'Donald, with a laugh. "This much I will tell you, that I do not now visit the station in the character of a bush-ranger——"

"And never were one!" exclaimed the honest stock-keeper. "Hang me if I believe it! But I am glad to see you here both together. Hang it! I have been looking forward the whole year to the time when I should drive these horses to Adelaide, and now I would give anything to return with you to the station."

"They are all well, I hope?"

"Sound as fish in water. There is only Miss Sarah who has been a little unwell, but I have some notion the right doctor for her is just coming."

"But you must tell us——"

"Stop a moment, I shall be with you in a minute," said Bale, turning his horse round. "I must tell my men to rest a little with the animals, until I join them again." Putting spurs to his horse he went through the bush at full speed after the herd.

At the same time Mahong came from the other side, and declared, looking extremely puzzled, that he could find no traces of the white man, but that at any rate Nguyulloman could not have had the boots on, as the two tracks were, for a little distance, separate from each other.

But, what had become of the white man?—He could not have flown away through the air, nor was he sitting on any of the neighbouring trees—what could have become of him?

As they were standing near the abandoned fire, looking for the tracks, Bale returned.

"Hallo!" he called out, on seeing them examining the ground, "lost anything among the branches? or are there any blacks about?"

"Mahong, my man here," replied Walker, "came upon the tracks of an old friend of yours, and those of a white man, which he followed as far as this place; and one of the tracks disappears in a most mysterious manner."

"An old friend of mine?" said Bale, with surprise; "well, I should like to know who."

"Nguyulloman."

"What!" exclaimed Bale, with a tremendous oath, "is this wretch in the neighbourhood?"

"Here you can see his tracks, and he has gone into the bush."

"By heavens, it is that rascal!" exclaimed the stock-keeper. "That black cripple has more murders upon his soul than any bushranger in Australia. Do you know that, only four weeks ago, he attacked a bundle-man here, clung to him, and almost succeeded in pulling him into the Murray, where he wished to drown him. The poor devil fortunately escaped, and the cripple jumped into the river, diving in his old way; the man left his blanket and bundle to take care of themselves, and ran away as if old Nick was behind him, nor did he stop until he reached our station, almost dead with fear and fatigue. We all of us went out in search of the cripple, but he had no doubt escaped down with the stream, and we could discover no traces of him."

"Kaimeki!"* exclaimed Mahong, just at this moment, in dismay and horror, after returning to the coals which he dispersed. "Here are the tracks!"

"Under the ashes?" Bale asked, with an expression of incredulity.

"Yakkangannai!"* said Mahong, with a shudder, pointing with the stick he held in his hand at some portions of a human body which were concealed in the most cunning way under the fire. No doubt remained that the black had surprised and killed the poor wanderer during the night, and in his sleep; had thrown his body into the hole formed by the roots of the fallen tree; after which, sand, soil, and foliage had been heaped upon it with such extraordinary cunning as almost entirely to conceal the body, without leaving any traces on the ground. The coals had been heaped up upon the top, and entirely covered the grave of the unfortunate man, which would scarcely have been discovered if the black had not come upon the tracks so soon after the deed.

A short council of war was held, which Mahong decided,

* Exclamations of surprise and horror.

inasmuch as he declared that, under any circumstances, he would follow Nguyulloman's tracks. If they found him in the bush he could not escape them; and if his tracks led to the water they would have to give it up, well knowing, from old experience, that in this case they had no chance with the cripple.

Walker asked M'Donald to take the left wing, and Bale the right, and keeping at a distance of about two or three hundred yards from Mahong. This was done; Mahong, in order to be the better able to follow the tracks, led his horse by the bridle, and Walker rode close behind him, and, commanding a more distant prospect from his saddle, followed him slowly, and carefully examined everything about him.

In this manner they proceeded for above an hour through the bush. Mahong kept his eyes fixed on the track, looking neither to the right nor to the left; and Bale and M'Donald watched cautiously, and were ready at any moment to fire at the black, in case he should show himself. Their chase, however, seemed doomed to end without result; the steep bank of the river lay at a few hundred paces in advance, and there could scarcely be any doubt but that Nguyulloman had reached and taken to the stream. It had been agreed that the search should be carried on as quietly as possible, and, above all, that they should not shout out to each other, as the sound of their voices would put the cripple on his guard, and enable him to take to the river. Bale, perceiving the river-side so close, and knowing the fabulous and almost supernatural ease with which the cripple moved in the water, called out to the lieutenant, on reaching an open space—

"It is useless—that black beast has taken to the water, and we might as well try to track a fish in it as that cursed spider-legged rascal. I will ride through the dry creek of the Billibong, and shall no doubt find the tracks."

Mahong looked up with vexation, on hearing the stock-keeper's loud voice. The latter cared little for this, but, following his own idea, rode into a sandy small bed, which the river formed when the waters were high, and which was about a hundred paces from the proper bed. The tracks of the smallest animal could plainly be distinguished in the light sand, and Bale, even at some distance, caught sight of th

broad plain tracks left in the soft sand by the dragging form of the cripple.

"He went through here!" he shouted to Mahong, raising himself in the saddle. "If we only could have cut him off!"

"There he goes; make haste, Bale!" shouted Walker, giving his own horse the spurs.

"Where? where?" shouted the stock-keeper, who was in a hollow, and could not see very far. On springing to the eminence, he perceived, at scarcely twenty paces from the river, the repulsive form of his black and cunning enemy, leaping, like a gigantic toad, over an open space towards the river.

"Tally ho!" shouted the stock-keeper, taking his horse over a smaller ditch, which he cleared at one bound. "Tally ho!" and in a few minutes he overtook the cripple. As the latter squatted down on the ground the horse shyed, reared, and the black, seeing his advantage, crept to the next bush, which overhung the stream. Bale forced his horse round; Walker and Mahong in the meantime came up at full speed, and the former, swinging the heavy whip, which in the hands of these men becomes a formidable weapon, round his head, struck with the lash the cripple's left arm with such force and accuracy of aim, that he cut the flesh to the very bone.

"Have we got you at last?" he exclaimed, turning his horse round to renew the blow if necessary.

Nguyulloman was stretched on the ground by the dreadful blow from the heavy whip, which deprived him instantly of the use of his left arm, and he howled with pain. As the white man rode up to him, he rose, and, although Bale saw the movement, he was not able to escape, for, at the same moment, a sharp piece of limestone, hurled by the unerring hand of the cripple, hit him on the forehead with such force that he let fall both whip and bridle, and as the horse, startled by the movement, jumped on one side, he fell heavily to the ground.

After this successful throw Nguyulloman attempted as quickly as possible to reach the shore, but his career was ended. Mahong, who, at the first alarm given by Walker, had vaulted into the saddle with the quickness of lightning, came up, sabre in hand, and hit the unfortunate wretch, just as he reached the bank, in the neck.

The cripple cast a look of the most deadly hatred at his

foe, then clutched with his right hand at the empty air, as if trying to hold himself, and fell down the steep bank into the river. The waters closed over him dyed with his blood.

At the same moment Walker reached the scene of the conflict, and leaping from his horse, saw the body in the last death struggle in which the cripple attempted to come to the surface, but the rapid current carried him along, and the dark bloody spot on the yellow foaming waves was the last trace of the murderer.

Mahong followed his enemy with wild and triumphant looks. Whilst M'Donald and Walker were engaged with the stock-keeper, who was fortunately only stunned, his eye fell on a small bundle which he had cut off from the neck of the cripple, and which lay at his feet on the sand. It was a blue cotton handkerchief, tied together by the four corners, and the contents did not leave them the least doubt about the murder committed on the unfortunate bundle-man. It contained the little that the black murderer thought worth taking from his victim; the yellow brass buttons of his jacket, an old knife, with only half a blade left, two little pieces of tobacco, and three shillings in silver.

Bale soon recovered his senses; the stone had only grazed his forehead, without doing him any further harm. The grey, which had gallopped after the other horses, had to be brought back by Mahong, before they could continue their journey.

A sad duty remained to be fulfilled, namely, to examine the body of the murdered man, in order to see whether they could discover anything that would enable them to identify him, or to tell to what place he belonged. The examination, which Mahong made with the greatest care, and still greater coolness, did not produce the least result. The missing buttons from the jacket showed plainly that Nguyulloman, at any rate, had assisted in the murder, and deserved his punishment; nothing else was found upon the dead body which could have thrown any light upon the subject. Bale did not know the face, although he had seen many men of this class about the station. These workmen, mostly old convicts, who have either served out their time, or received a pass, with permission to seek work like other *free*-labourers, frequently wander from station to station, and as no one cares

about them, nor what becomes of them, they not unfrequently fall victims to the malicious blacks. The latter hate *all* white men; they can satisfy their vengeance on these poor fellows without fear of the consequences. The spoils in these cases usually consist of a woollen blanket and knife, and sometimes a piece of tobacco; but this is quite sufficient to allure the blacks.

To judge from the wounds inflicted upon the unfortunate man's head, Nguyulloman must have crept up to him during the night, and killed him by striking him a blow upon the temple with a stone.

The party replaced the body in the grave, covered it with sand and soil, dragged a quantity of branches of trees on it to keep away the wild dogs, and placed at his head a cross, roughly bound together—the sad memorial of many a poor and lonely wanderer, slain far from his own home and kindred.

Bale had in the meantime recovered, and he eased his heart by pouring forth a number of the strangest oaths and curses against the blacks in general, and Nguyulloman in particular. His time was, however, up; and he was forced to follow his horses. Walker and M'Donald also felt anxious to reach their goal before night; so after a short, but hearty leave-taking, and without dwelling particularly on the wild adventure which, after so long a separation, had brought them together again, looking upon it as something quite natural to life in the bush, they separated, each bent upon hastening towards his destination.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

The sun was sinking behind the tops of the malley bushes; the trembling lights and shadows which it cast on their red stalks and bright green leaves, imparted to them a charm not always found in the Australian bush. Swarms of white kakadoos nestled among the lofty gum-trees by the shore, resting for the night among their branches. The river, along the banks of which the riders were now galloping, was covered with flocks of wild ducks, flying up and down; two black swans, seeking their food, swam rapidly against the current as soon as they heard the noise of the approaching hoofs, until the travellers drew near. They then spread out their wings, and, following the bend of the river, were soon lost to sight.

"There lies the station," said Walker, pointing with his left hand. "There is the sand-hill from which the black cripple gave the signal,—I can see the smoke ascending from the houses at the back."

"And there!" exclaimed M'Donald, as he caught hold of his companion's arm with one hand, while with the other he stopped his horse.

"What?—where?" asked Walker, looking in the direction pointed out by his friend; "ha! by heavens!" he added, reining in his horse, "the young ladies, and just at the very place, M'Donald, where I once met you so earnestly engaged in conversation with Miss Sarah. Mahong can take the horses to the house; let us go and surprise the ladies. I hope we shall at least meet with a friendly reception."

They hastily dismounted, and giving the bridles to Mahong, hastened to the spot where they had seen the light-coloured dresses of the young ladies.

Walker was right; the place was the same, although much altered since he had seen it last. It had become Sarah's favourite spot, and many a sweet and sad hour had she spent here alone, or in the company of her sister.

Their brothers had made the place as attractive as possible. A long, comfortable seat was put up against the gigantic gum-tree which stood there; the passion flower which grows

so luxuriantly in Australia, twined around the frame, making altogether a shady and pleasant bower.

Lisbeth reclined against the trunk of the gum-tree, and gazed at the rapid and swollen stream, while Sarah, who was sitting upon the form, turned over the leaves of a book lying in her lap; at last she closed the volume, and seemed lost in thought, as she looked at the old bullet-mark on the binding.

"You must know 'Lalla Rookh' by heart, by this time," said Lisbeth, turning to her with a smile; "you have been studying it the whole year, as if you intended to learn every line. Come, Sarah," she added, tenderly, on perceiving how these words hurt her sister, "shake off those sad and gloomy thoughts which have so long been preying upon your heart. Mr. Bale may be back in a few weeks, and we shall at least know something certain. In the meantime trust to the good news we received. Although there is no name in the communication, it was sent to us by a *friend* who can have no object in endeavouring to deceive us."

"You are right," Sarah replied, "we must *hope*. I really cannot tell you myself why I feel so anxious to-day."

"Because we sent letters off to-day," said Lisbeth; "but there are strangers coming. Look! there is a groom leading two horses."

"The black police!" exclaimed Sarah, starting up from her seat in terror.

"Indeed, I think you are right," Lisbeth answered, without taking her eyes off the horses; "the dark black head and the blue uniform. But where are the riders?"

"Here, madam!" said a laughing voice scarcely ten paces from her, "and extremely glad to find you looking so well."

"Lieutenant Walker!" cried Lisbeth, as pale as death—"Lieutenant Walker, and——"

"*Captain* Walker, if you will allow me," said the young man, smiling, and making a slight bow; "and here," he added, turning round, and taking the hand of M'Donald, who followed close behind, "is an old friend of your house, whom I took from you for a short time only to restore strengthened in body and spirit. By heavens, M'Donald, have you lost your powers of speech, that you let me deliver the address quite alone?"

"M'Donald!" exclaimed Lisbeth with amazement, and quite bewildered; her glance went from him to her sister, who was supporting herself against the gum-tree, trembling, and unable to utter a word.

M'Donald was at her side in an instant.

"Sarah—my dear, dear Sarah!" he whispered to her, placing his arm round her slender and tottering frame, and supporting her.

"Are you still angry with me, Miss Lisbeth?" said Walker, drawing, without ceremony, the arm of the astonished young lady within his own, and walking towards the house without taking any further notice of the other pair.

"I *was* very angry with you," said Lisbeth, endeavouring to get her arm free; but Walker would not loose his hold.

"You are not angry now, are you?"

Lisbeth looked at him; his features wore a sweet smile, with an expression of sadness round the well-formed lips, that she answered, much more feelingly than had been her intention—

"No; how could I?" she added, in a low voice and blushing, "after the service you rendered to us on that fearful morning. You delivered me from that demon who had already seized me, and—saved my mother!"

"But the evening before——"

"Do not speak of it!" said Lisbeth, with a shudder—"it was horrible!"

"And, nevertheless, I have brought you back a living memorial of that scene: pray, be not uneasy about your sister, she is in good hands."

"But I do not understand—pray tell me——"

"To-night!" replied Walker, smiling. "If I mistake not, you are fond of hearing stories of bushrangers?"

"Yes; but not with such a conclusion."

"Nevertheless, the one of to-night will end exactly in the same manner, with the only difference, that Miss Sarah will perhaps take *my* part, and I shall in the end have to go away empty-handed."

"There comes father!" Lisbeth exclaimed, suddenly pointing to the spot where old Mr. Powell, who had seen the horses, was advancing to meet the guests.

"A sight which does one's heart good!" said Walker, let-

ting go the young lady's arm, and advancing towards Mr. Powell. "It is rather uncertain whether I shall meet with a very friendly reception from my kind host of former times."

"Mr. Walker!" exclaimed Mr. Powell, stopping short with surprise and almost dismay; "and there—am I dreaming or awake?—M'Donald, the bushranger, in *your* company?—here?"

"Father, dear father!" cried Sarah, hastening towards her father, and burying her beautiful face, radiant with joy and happiness, on his bosom.

"My child, my dear child!" said the old man, his voice trembling with emotion; "but how is all this? To whom are we indebted for this joy?"

Sarah did not reply, but she stretched out her hand to Walker, who seized it and gratefully carried it to his lips.

Night, sparkling with myriads of stars, covered the forest; the babbling river flowed along beneath the whispering gum-trees; in the bush resounded the wild howl of the dingo, and far in the thicket, close to a crackling fire, whose tongues were lapping and rocking the branches hanging down to it, lay the stock-keeper Bale, and looked discontentedly at the flame. His face was bandaged up in consequence of the day's skirmish, and at his side, and within reach of his hand, a quart-pot of stock-and-rider tea* stood upon a heap of charcoal.

"A wretched life this!" he growled, taking a draught out of the hot tin pot, and spitting out the pieces of wood that came between his teeth, "a wretched life, hang it! A dingo is better off. Why, he only seeks in the bush what he chooses, and always lives with his equals wherever he goes. Hang it! a decent fellow and a Christian is obliged to knock about this cursed country for years, running after horses and cattle the whole day, and when the evening comes at last, he may lie down on his 'possum cloak, to be alert on the following morning, and ready for more work. I have had more than enough of this sort of life. Now they are sitting at home, it seems as if I saw them, pair by pair—and laughing and

* So called from the pieces of wood floating on it.

making merry—and Bale!—well, when he returns from Adelaide, he will bring them back newspapers, and they already look forward to that day—for the sake of the papers and letters."

He remained silent, and looked for a short time thoughtfully at the flames.

"Hang it!" he continued. "There is something fine and manly in being the whole day in the saddle on a spirited horse, and speeding through the bush to one's heart's content,—if one only knew to what purpose, and for whom. If that rascal of a black had only hit me a little more to the right, and laid me in the sand for ever, who would have cared about it? Not a soul—not even my horse. 'Poor Bale!' they would perhaps have said, 'it is a great pity—he was such a good stock-keeper, and a good fellow in other respects, too—if we could only find another to fill his place.' Bah! so much for Australia!"—and putting his saddle to rights under his head, he turned upon his side, pulled his blanket over his shoulder, and closed his eyes.

Night, sparkling with myriads of stars, covered the forest. The babbling river flowed along beneath the whispering gum-trees; in the bush resounded the wild howl of the dingo. But through the fragrant bushes, which surrounded the squatter's house, the windows shone brightly and merrily, casting their long and narrow reflection over yard, and fence, and bush. Then, in the cheerful room of the newly-built house, standing on the old round table, on which purred and sang the tea-urn, blowing the wreaths of steam into the air, the high lamp shed its mild light on none but happy faces. They sat and talked, and asked, and narrated, and could not hear enough of each other. They enjoyed the hour which God's paternal mercy had blessed them with in recompense for long-sufferings. The sorrow which they had endured melted in a short moment, during which—dark and sad as it had been—their happiness had taken root, and grown up into a beautiful and fruitful tree.

Walker, much as he rejoiced at M'Donald's happiness, still required some time to combat many an old and painful recol-

lection which might have troubled his peace. It was well for him that he found, at the same time, a new talisman, which helped him so much sooner to overcome these feelings.

Lisbeth knew from her sister—and she had also perceived herself—the hopes he had formerly entertained. The more exasperated she was at first at his conduct towards M'Donald, the more his true and generous friendship towards the *fortunate* rival raised him in her estimation. In the first instance he had acted as his duty required; in the latter, as a free man; and as in the former instance, he showed his courage, so, in the latter, did he prove his kind and generous heart.

The two friends had intended to spend a few days at the station, and then return to Adelaide; but weeks passed before they thought of their departure.

At last, when M'Donald, provided with all the means to commence a happy existence, asked Sarah's parents for her hand, he was joyfully accepted by them as their son. Walker remained silent, and, once more, for the last time, a pang of sadness shot through his heart. A few hours later the horses were brought out, and, as the two friends stood before the house to take their leave, Walker bent down to Lisbeth and whispered in her ear. She did not reply, but a deep blush suffused her cheeks and neck, and when her eyes met those of the young officer the latter vaulted into the saddle with a shout of joy, and the two riders sped through the bush with their hearts full of bliss and happiness.

In the same year Mr. Powell sold his cattle, and left the wild country by the Murray. He exchanged his station for another, situated in a more civilized part of Australia, at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

In the cheerful valleys of that district, situated at short distances from each other, three stations may be seen, one of which is managed by George, Mr. Powell's eldest son. His parents repose from the active duties of life, and their time during the year is sufficiently occupied in visiting their children, and contributing to the happiness of the young members of the different families.

THE END.

Stirling, September 1885.

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MDME. MARIE ROZE *(Prima Donna, Her Majesty's Theatre)* writes:—"For preserving the complexion, keeping the skin soft, free from redness and roughness, and the hands in nice condition, PEARS' SOAP *is the finest preparation in the world.*"

MISS MARY ANDERSON writes:—"I have used PEARS' SOAP for two years with the greatest satisfaction, for *I find it the very best.*"

PEARS' SOAP—SOLD EVERYWHERE